



WATER AFFORDABILITY

REPORT

MULTI-CITY CASE STUDY

NEW JERSEY
2026

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Water affordability and infrastructure challenges are connected. We need to invest in water infrastructure to maintain it, and we also need to fund those investments in ways that ensure people can afford to pay their water bills as part of their overall household expenses. An estimated one-fifth of all New Jersey households struggle to afford their water and sewer bills. Unaffordable water bills threaten savings, wealth building, critical expenditures, and access to water as unpaid bills may incur compounding interest¹ and penalties that make it harder to pay off the debt, ultimately leading to shut-offs and tax lien sales.

Multifaceted solutions are needed to address the water affordability problem, potentially including improved rate structures, state- and federal-level infrastructure financing, more efficient utility operations, reduced in-home water use, leakage detection, and household assistance programs. Permanent solutions in this area can have far-reaching benefits. These include strengthening the ability to build savings and retain wealth at the household level, reducing the financial strain of tradeoffs between paying utility bills versus food or medicines, and ensuring access to basic needs such as clean drinking water and effective sewerage and stormwater services at the community level. Increasing the percentage of households that can routinely pay their bills also supports sustained progress of existing infrastructure projects such as lead service line removal, pipeline rehabilitation, improved treatment facilities, and combined sewer overflow controls, which are vital community infrastructure and have long-term health and economic benefits.

This report analyzes affordability challenges in water and sewer utilities across five New Jersey municipalities—**Trenton, Paterson, Newark, Camden, and Atlantic City**. It contextualizes the socio-economic profiles of these cities alongside the operational, financial, and regulatory issues facing their water and sewer systems. It also captures community resident stories of how water affordability affects them. The aim is to inform stakeholders about the complexities of utility service provision, regional disparities, and the financial impact on residents, particularly low-income households. Household affordability stresses identified in this report exist across all forms of utility ownership – municipal, utility authority, regional commission, and private sector – and are driven by a combination of combined utility rates (i.e., water and sewer services), cost of living, and household income.

AN ESTIMATED
20%
OF ALL NEW JERSEY
**HOUSEHOLDS
STRUGGLE
TO AFFORD THEIR WATER
AND SEWER BILLS**

Source: "Affordability of Residential Drinking Water and Sewer Utility Services," Jersey Water Works, August 9, 2022, <https://www.jerseywaterworks.org/latest-news/affordability-of-residential-drinking-water-and-sewer-utility-services/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jersey Water Works (JWW) is a collaborative effort of many diverse organizations and individuals who embrace the common purpose of transforming New Jersey's water infrastructure. Member organization, New Jersey Future, is the nonprofit, nonpartisan entity that serves as the backbone of the JWW collaborative. For over a decade, Jersey Water Works has been fostering improved practices, funding, and statutes and regulations for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure in New Jersey, with a particular focus on combined sewer overflows, lead in drinking water, affordability, and public engagement.

This report forms part of the affordability sub-committee's efforts within Jersey Water Works' Asset Management and Finance group to advance affordability initiatives.

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- Atlantic City Municipal Authority (ACMUA)
- Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA)
- New Jersey American Water

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KEY FINDINGS

- **Demographics and Economic Context:** All five cities are minority-majority with Hispanic and Black residents comprising approximately 68–95% of the population. Household incomes and home ownership rates are significantly lower than the statewide averages, while poverty rates range from two to three times the New Jersey average².
- **Utility Operations and Structure:** Each municipality in this report operates either or both water and sewer systems with varying governance models, including municipal ownership, regional agencies, and public-private partnerships. In two cases, either the water utility (part of Camden City) or the sewer utility (Atlantic City) is investor-owned. A few of the systems also serve adjacent municipalities with differing (often higher) income levels, complicating affordability initiatives.
- **Water System Challenges:** Common issues include high percentages of water leaking³ from distribution pipes or otherwise not being billed for, which results in increased rates, aging infrastructure, lead service line replacements, and other drinking water quality concerns (such as per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), nitrates, etc), and compliance with environmental regulations such as combined sewer overflow (CSO) controls and PFAS treatment.

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This report analyzes affordability challenges in water and sewer utilities across five New Jersey municipalities - Atlantic City, Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton.

- **Financial Pressures and Rate Increases:** Utilities face escalating capital and operational costs, which contribute to rising water and sewer rates across governance models. In communities with limited household incomes, these increases can exacerbate affordability stress even where rates are not unusually high relative to New Jersey averages.
- **Regulatory and Reporting Gaps:** Only two utilities covered in this report have fully complied (as of the time of analysis) with state requirements for reporting service shutoffs and customer arrears, hindering transparency into affordability impacts.
- **Regional Disparities in Affordability:** Utilities serving multiple municipalities may have areas with low, medium, and high affordability stresses; programs that require higher-income customers to subsidize lower-income households may create political opposition.
- **Limited Availability of Water Bill Assistance:** Unlike for electric and gas utilities, there are no federal or state programs (apart from NJ SHARES⁴) to help low-income households afford their water bills. Only one water or sewer utility covered in this report offers a household water assistance program that reduces low-income residents' water bills on an ongoing basis.

²As of 2023, based on the American Community Survey 5-year '19-'23 estimate, New Jersey's median household income is \$101,050, and New Jersey's poverty rate is 9.8 percent.

³This leakage and otherwise unbilled water is known as "non-revenue water." Typically the majority of non-revenue water is from leaking water mains. The percentage of non-revenue water in the five cities ranges from roughly 4% (in a system that serves a portion of Camden) to over 38% (in Paterson's regional system).

⁴SHARES Nation serves as a safety net for crisis situations such as inability to pay for vital services (gas, electric, water). NJ SHARES Municipal Customer Assistance Program (MCAP) provides water, sewer and electric assistance grants to income qualified households experiencing a temporary financial crisis. <https://sharesnation.org/>.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the five case studies, the following recommendations rise to the top:

- 1 Develop regional or statewide affordability programs**

Develop regional or statewide affordability programs that balance equity across municipalities, ensuring that low-income households receive targeted assistance. Many municipalities have insufficient household incomes to support affordability programs without outside assistance.
- 2 Enhance transparency**

Enhance transparency and compliance with state reporting requirements on shutoffs and delinquent accounts to better understand and manage affordability pressures.
- 3 Reduce water leakage**

Prioritize investments in infrastructure improvements to reduce water leakage from distribution pipes, thereby improving revenue, and support lead service line replacements and PFAS treatment to improve system efficiency and health outcomes.
- 4 Secure and maximize state and federal funding**

Secure and maximize state and federal funding, including state water infrastructure funding, grants, as well as principal forgiveness⁴ and low-interest loans through New Jersey's Water Bank, to mitigate the financial burden on ratepayers facing rising utility costs.
- 5 Optimizing cost efficiency**

Optimize cost efficiency without sacrificing water quality performance through methods such as increased preventive maintenance, improved procurement practices to secure lower prices (e.g., cooperative purchasing agreements), increased utility energy efficiency, and optimized biosolids dewatering for wastewater treatment.
- 6 Address perceptions**

Address perceptions about drinking water quality, so that households can reduce bottled water expenditures without fear.
- 7 Expand assistance programs and explore alternative rate designs**

Expand utility-level household assistance programs and explore alternative rate designs to better accommodate the financial capacities of vulnerable populations.
- 8 Remove barriers to enrollment**

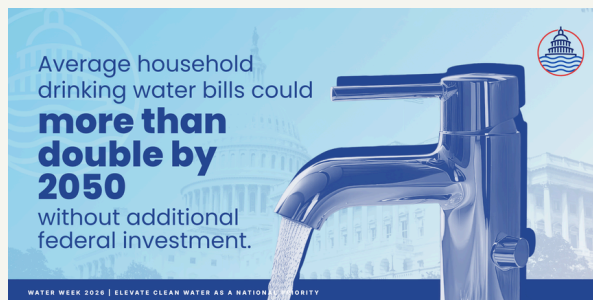
Remove barriers to enrollment in affordability and assistance programs by simplifying the application process, direct outreach, and utilizing automatic strategies (data-sharing agreements between utilities and other social services (e.g., energy assistance programs)) to automatically enroll eligible individuals.

⁴Financial mechanism where the portion of a loan's principal balance is waived or does not need to be repaid back. Commonly used to support under-resourced communities.

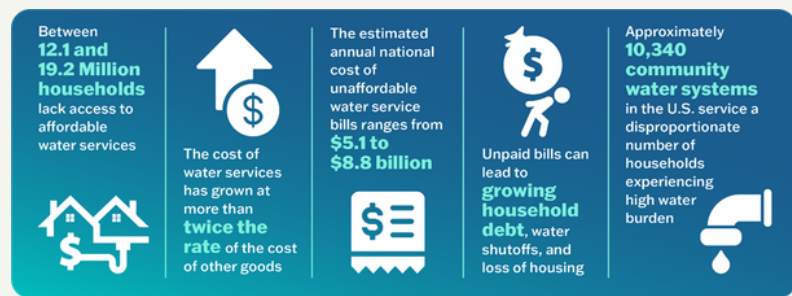
RESIDENT REFLECTIONS

Resident reflections/responses captured via community surveys in four out of the five cities point to the need for:

- Targeted outreach and simplified access to water assistance programs for households experiencing billing difficulties.
- Enhanced financial assistance and flexible payment options for those with limited or fixed incomes, and billing dispute channels
- Targeted proactive outreach and education explaining billing practices and available water assistance programs, before imposing shut-offs and tax liens.
- Dedicated funding streams for vulnerable households struggling to afford their water utility bills to prevent frequent shut-offs, which have a cascading impact on health and finances.
- Improved landlord engagement initiatives that provide water billing transparency and communicate costs to tenants.
- Upgraded infrastructure to address leaks and water quality issues, regain trust, and reduce reliance on bottled water.



Water Week 2026 Social Media Resources, <https://www.waterweek.us/#resources>



Source: EPA's 2024 Water Affordability Needs Assessment

KEY CONCLUSION

The case studies show that the need for significant infrastructure investments and compliance with environmental standards will continue to place upward pressure on water and sewer costs, which can exacerbate existing affordability stress for low- and moderate-income households, especially in areas with high costs of living. In these municipalities, affordability outcomes reflect the interaction of required system costs (often driven by regulatory requirements and the need to replace or repair aging infrastructure) with widespread poverty (i.e., limited household savings), low household incomes, and high housing costs. Household affordability stresses identified in this report exist across all forms of utility ownership – municipal, utility authority, regional commission, and private sector – indicating more systemic societal issues. Without strategic interventions, residents of the case study municipalities—Trenton, Paterson, Newark, Camden, and Atlantic City—and other similar municipalities will experience increasing financial strain due to rising water and sewer utility costs amid widespread poverty and low home ownership, as renters have fewer options to accommodate rent increases. Regional utility-led and statewide affordability programs, with coordinated approaches, offer the best opportunity to equitably distribute costs and benefits but require careful design to address the diverse constituencies involved. Effective management of these challenges is essential to ensure reliable, safe, and equitable water and sewer services and safeguard public health in these communities.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Assistance programs may offer temporary financial support, such as covering overdue bills to prevent service shutoff, as well as ongoing aid to reduce future bills. All assistance programs provide a set level of support, regardless of a household's total bill amount.

Water affordability programs are financial assistance and rate-reduction initiatives designed to help low-income households and vulnerable customers pay for drinking water and wastewater services.

Consequences for Late Payment/Non-Payment Varies Significantly by Utility

May include:

- Extended payment plan opportunity (mandated for privately owned utilities)
- Late fees / penalties / interest (only publicly owned utilities)
- Tax lien sales (only publicly owned utilities)
- Shut Off
- Disconnection/reconnection fees, deposit

Protections differ depending on whether the utility is municipal or privately owned and may include coverage for medical needs, minimum payment amounts, grace periods, notice requirements, and extreme temperatures.

In New Jersey, **winter and summer protections** are in effect during designated months each year for low-income customers and others facing financial hardship, regardless of the daily temperature.

Are water utilities reporting data on shutoffs and other affordability-related metrics?

A May 2023 order by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities requires all publicly and privately owned water and wastewater utilities (as well as electric and gas utilities) to regularly report data on affordability-related metrics, such as average and median customer usage and bills, shutoffs, arrears, tax lien sales, and participation in low-income assistance programs. The Board's order implements legislation that was enacted in 2022, which requires all publicly and privately owned utilities to submit these reports, regardless of whether they are otherwise subject to BPU regulation.

The law's intent is to show where people struggle with utility bills and where utilities struggle to recover revenue from their customers. Submitted reports can be found on BPU's website in this docket. Presently, most of New Jersey's water and wastewater utilities do not appear to be submitting these reports. Improved compliance with the reporting requirements is critical for understanding and addressing water affordability challenges.

Transparency helps make the case for policy solutions, such as creating a statewide affordability program and increasing state funding for water infrastructure funding.

AFFORDABILITY

CITY CASE STUDY SUMMARIES



ATLANTIC CITY

Atlantic City is the 61st most populous municipality in New Jersey (less than 40,000 people). From a national perspective, it is a very small city. As with most historic cities in New Jersey, it is “minority majority”, with Black and Hispanic residents comprising nearly 68% of the population and Asian residents another 16%. Atlantic City residents have far lower household incomes than the rest of New Jersey; the median and 20th percentile incomes are roughly one-third of the statewide values. Poverty rates in Atlantic City are more than three times that of New Jersey, and home ownership rates are less than half of the statewide average.

Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority (ACMUA) owns and operates the drinking water system. No useful information is publicly available regarding water loss (non-revenue water). Planned capital projects for the next three years are high, indicating a need for system upgrades. ACMUA rates have been increasing annually and remain somewhat lower than the statewide average. However, those rates are a greater burden relative to household income than the statewide average, due to lower household incomes in the city. ACMUA has not reported statistics on service shutoffs and delinquent costs; such accounting is required by state law. Sewage collection services are provided by an investor-owned utility, the Atlantic City Sewerage Company (ACSC), while sewage treatment is provided by the publicly owned Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA). ACUA’s sewer treatment

rates are the lowest in South Jersey; however, the regional authority does not bill residential customers directly. Instead, ACUA charges the ACSC based on annual wastewater flows, and the ACSC is responsible for billing individual customers.

ACSC rates for residential customers include both fixed annual and volumetric charges (based on water demand above a specific amount). One significant advantage for Atlantic City is that it has no combined sewers. In contrast, a disadvantage is that all its water utility infrastructure is at risk from sea level rise and major coastal storms.

Water and sewer utilities serving Atlantic City require significant improvements, which are contributing to increased financial burdens for residents. Major costs are associated with other drinking water quality concerns (including PFAS, nitrates, microbes, etc), and aging water and sewer infrastructure. Financial stresses from lead service line replacements are likely to be significantly less than those of the other four municipalities in this study. An affordability program applied only to Atlantic City would impose greater burdens on some city residents (most of whom are not high-income) to improve affordability for lower-income households. ACUA has by far the larger service area, but as a regional sewer utility, it does not directly bill residential customers.



CAMDEN

Camden is the 16th-most populous municipality in New Jersey. From a national perspective, Camden is a small city (slightly more than 70,000 people), ranking roughly 532nd in the United States. As with most historic cities in New Jersey, it is a “minority majority”, with Hispanic and Black residents comprising roughly 95% of the population. Camden residents have far lower household incomes than the rest of New Jersey; the median and 20th percentile incomes are 40% and 36% (respectively) of the statewide values. Poverty rates in Camden are nearly three times that of New Jersey, and home ownership rates (36%) are slightly more than one-half of the statewide average.

Camden City owns the drinking water services for the southern portion of the city. The drinking water rates in the Camden City area are set by the municipality through a combined fixed-base and volumetric pricing structure. In 2024, the city implemented its first significant rate increase in recent years. As of the latest reporting cycle, Camden City had not disclosed these statistics for the area served by the municipal system.

State law mandates such financial reporting. The city contracts with New Jersey American Water to provide on-site operations.

New Jersey American Water owns and operates drinking water services in the northern area (roughly one-third of Camden households), which has slightly higher home-ownership rates. New Jersey American Water uses a combined rate of fixed base charges and volumetric charges in all its direct service areas. New Jersey American Water has reported data on shutoffs and delinquent accounts for its Camden service area. Among New Jersey American’s service areas, the Camden shutoff rate is the highest. That result should be understood in light of Camden’s exceptionally low household incomes and broader socioeconomic conditions, which also affects affordability in areas of Camden City not served by

New Jersey American Water. New Jersey American Water supports eligible residential customers through its H2O Help to Others Program™, which is administered by SHARES. The program consists of two primary components: grants and Universal Affordability discounts, the latter of which is a more recent expansion. The company also provides flexible payment options and other customer assistance programs for qualifying customers experiencing financial hardship and who require help paying their bills.

The two major systems differ significantly in the portion of drinking water that leaks from the system or is otherwise not billed to end-users (i.e., non-revenue water), which is a useful indicator of leakage-related water loss. While the Camden City system reports nearly 29% non-revenue water, the New Jersey American Water reported a far lower rate of less than 4%. In addition to the two systems, a very small area of less than 1,000 people is served by the Merchantville Pennsauken Water Commission.

The City of Camden provides sewage collection services. The sewage treatment is provided by the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA), a regional facility. Camden City has mostly combined sewers, resulting in major upcoming costs for combined sewer overflow (CSO) controls. CCMUA directly bills residential sewer services using a flat fee. Camden customers receive a significant discount from the standard CCMUA rates in compensation for the CCMUA treatment plant's location within the City. The City charges additional sewer fees based on a fixed charge and volumetric rates (if the property has a meter) or a fixed fee (for other properties) to cover the local costs of the sewage collection system. This rate is also rising.

CAMDEN

cont.

Camden residents face significant existing and future financial stresses from water utility fees. The current high rate of water service shutoffs for non-payment is a strong indicator of affordability stresses. Camden is required to implement CSO controls under the regional Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), along with neighboring Gloucester City and the CCMUA. Additional sewer costs will come from improvements to an aging sewer system. Likewise, the city-owned portion of Camden's aging drinking water system requires significant improvements, for which Camden must provide the capital funds. These improvements include lead service line replacements, addressing other drinking water quality concerns (such as PFAS and nitrates), replacing aging infrastructure, and reducing water loss.

For investor-owned utilities such as New Jersey American Water, rate cases are the process used to seek recovery of prudently incurred capital investments, subject to review by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. Because these projects are long-term and capital-intensive, they may place upward pressure on rates over time. New Jersey American Water has indicated that continued infrastructure investment will require additional rate adjustments; in January 2026, the utility proposed a rate increase that would add approximately \$10 per month on average for residential drinking water customers. For low-income customers, New Jersey



American Water offers bill discounts and grants, but Camden residents may continue to struggle to maintain their bill payments and remain at risk of service termination. CCMUA provides a significant discount in its flat-fee rate structure for Camden residents, but expanded state and/or federal assistance programs, as well as an improvement in household incomes, are necessary to fully address the affordability challenges facing these residents.

NEWARK

Newark is currently the most populous municipality in New Jersey, with roughly 317,000 residents. From a national perspective, Newark is a larger medium-sized city, ranking 64th in the United States. As with most historic cities in New Jersey, it is a “minority majority”, with Black and Hispanic residents comprising nearly 90% of the population. Newark residents have far lower household incomes than the State as a whole; the median and 20th percentile incomes are both less than half the statewide values. Poverty rates in Newark are 2.5 times that of New Jersey, and home ownership rates at 24.1% are less than half of the statewide average.

The Newark Department of Water & Sewer Utilities is responsible for drinking water storage, treatment, and delivery to all of Newark, as well as through bulk supply contracts to many nearby municipalities. Out of the five case studies, Newark is the only drinking water utility that has a major reservoir system (the Pequannock system). The city is also responsible for its sewer system, with treatment provided primarily by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC) and a smaller portion by the Joint Meeting of Essex and Union Counties (JMEUC). Newark charges residential customers directly for both water and sewer use; the water rate is based solely on usage, while the sewer rate is a fixed fee with no volumetric component. The rates for drinking water are well below statewide averages (roughly half); nevertheless, the department is implementing a five-year water rate increase from 2023 to 2027. Newark has not reported statistics on service shutoffs and delinquent costs; such accounting is required by state law.

Newark completed its lead service line replacement program, a nationally recognized program funded primarily by non-utility sources⁵. Newark has also significantly improved its water treatment plant to address issues with lead and other contaminants. The city also faces major capital costs in the coming years to address its commitments to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) through its portion of the regional Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), and will also help pay for PVSC’s system improvements to reduce CSOs. Major asset improvement projects will also be needed to address PFAS contamination and aging infrastructure, the need for which is shown by the high level (36% as of 2024) of water that leaks from the distribution system or is otherwise not billed to end-users (i.e., non-revenue water).

While Newark’s current water utility rates are relatively low, the high levels of poverty remain a concern that could be exacerbated by future rate increases. An affordability program applied only to Newark would impose greater burdens on some Newark residents (most of whom are not high-income) to improve affordability for lower-income households.



PATERSON

Paterson has roughly 160,000 residents and is the 3rd most populous municipality in New Jersey. As with most historic cities in New Jersey, it is a “minority majority”, with Hispanic (primarily) and Black residents comprising nearly 90% of the population. Paterson residents have far lower household incomes than New Jersey as a whole; the median and 20th percentile incomes are roughly half and less than half (respectively) of the statewide values. Poverty rates in Paterson are more than twice that of New Jersey, and home ownership rates at 26.2% are half of the statewide average.

Paterson is co-owner of the Passaic Valley Water Commission (PVWC); the other owners are the City of Clifton and the City of Passaic. PVWC also provides water supplies to “Prospect Park, Lodi, North Arlington, a section of Woodland Park, and to over 22 wholesale customers in Passaic, Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Morris Counties⁶.” PVWC charges customers directly in Paterson and other areas where it owns the distribution system, including Clifton and Passaic. Residential rates for PVWC have been increasing consistently, slightly above the Consumer Price Index (CPI), driven by both capital and operational costs. PVWC as a whole has a significant but declining share of its treated water that leaks from water mains or is otherwise delivered into the distribution system. These are not billed to any end-user (i.e., non-revenue water), with 38% reported for 2023 and 27.45% for 2024. The relative contribution of Paterson water lines to this situation is unknown, but all PVWC customers share the cost of this “water loss.” PVWC directly bills residential customers in its direct service area based on a combined rate comprising a fixed base charge and a volumetric charge for water usage. PVWC has reported statistics on service shutoffs and delinquent costs in its 2025 public annual report, available on its website.

While Paterson owns and operates its sewage collection system, the sewage treatment is provided by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC). PVSC costs are distributed to service area municipalities based on relative sewer flows into the PVSC interceptors. Paterson charges residential sewer customers an annual fixed charge that covers both local costs and costs allocated to the city by PVSC. The rate does not include a volumetric component.

Both the water and sewer utilities in Paterson are under significant financial challenges due to declining infrastructure quality and capital project requirements. PVWC faces major costs for lead service line replacements and other drinking water quality issues (including PFAS, nitrates, etc), mandated replacement of uncovered finished drinking water reservoirs, and asset improvement costs. Paterson is required to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) through its portion of the regional Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), and will also help pay for PVSC’s system improvements to reduce CSOs.

Both PVWC and PVSC have large service areas with some diversity in household income levels (more so for PVSC). Conversely, Paterson residents overall have limited financial capacity and will be subject to higher water utility costs, directly or indirectly, from both agencies, in addition to costs incurred by Paterson for CSO controls. Affordability concerns are expected to increase over time. An affordability program applied only to Paterson would impose greater burdens on some Paterson residents (most of whom are not high-income) to improve affordability for even lower-income households. A more regional approach (e.g., for the entire PVWC and PVSC service areas) would spread the costs of household assistance programs more widely. PVSC has by far the largest service area; however, as a regional sewer utility, it does not directly bill any residential customers.

TRENTON

Trenton, New Jersey's state capital, is the 10th-most-populous municipality in the state (slightly more than 90,000 people). As with most historic cities in New Jersey, it is a "minority majority," with Black and Hispanic residents comprising nearly 90% of the population. Trenton residents have far lower household incomes than New Jersey as a whole; the median and 20th percentile incomes are less than half and one-third (respectively) of the statewide values. Poverty rates in Trenton are nearly 2.5 times that of New Jersey, and home ownership rates are half of the statewide average.

Trenton City's Department of Water & Sewer owns and operates a water supply utility known as Trenton Water Works (TWW). This utility directly serves all or portions of four adjacent municipalities: Ewing, Hamilton, Hopewell, and Lawrence Townships. These municipalities currently have significantly higher household incomes and home-ownership rates than Trenton. Overall, Trenton Water Works has a very high level (34.4%) of water that leaks from the system or is otherwise not billed to end-users (i.e., non-revenue water), which places pressure on water rates. Trenton also owns and operates the city sewage collection and treatment system, which does not serve other municipalities. Due to concerns about the drinking water system, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) asserted direct operational oversight in 2022. Both systems use a combined rate of a fixed base charge and a volumetric charge based on water usage.

Because the TWW drinking water system is regional, there are significant differences in incentives and constraints for water utility service provision between Trenton and the other four municipalities, which have far lower poverty rates.

The impact of rate increases on household finances is far higher for Trenton. Rate pressures are high, as Trenton Water Works faces multiple costly requirements for both drinking water and sewer utility functions. These include lead service line replacement and other drinking water quality concerns (such as PFAS and nitrates), reductions in high non-revenue water rates, and improved asset management for both the water and sewer systems. The result will be an increased financial burden on households (directly or through rents), especially if state and federal subsidies (e.g., grants and "principal forgiveness") are limited. As of the most recent reporting cycle, TWW has not reported statistics on service shutoffs and customer arrears to NJDEP even though such accounting is required by state law.

In 2025, the NJDEP and the NJ Infrastructure Bank released analyses and recommendations regarding the Trenton Water Works drinking water system and the benefits of an alternative public ownership or governance structure. Discussions are expected to continue into the new state administration. Regardless of the results, on average, residents of Trenton will face greater financial burdens (water utility costs relative to income) than those in the other four municipalities with their higher median household incomes. An affordability program that applies only to Trenton would impose greater burdens on some Trenton residents (most of whom are not high-income) to improve affordability for lower-income households. An affordability program applicable across all five municipalities would assist low-income residents regardless of location; however, a greater proportion of Trenton households would benefit because of disparities in median household income.

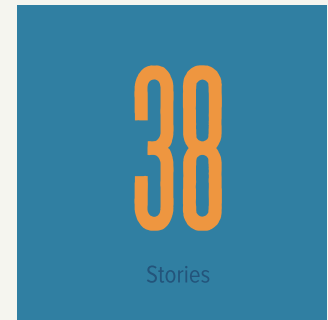


UTILITIES AND PROGRAMS THEY OFFER

Atlantic City	Camden	Newark	Paterson	Trenton
Drinking Water: Atlantic City Municipal Authority (ACMUA) Wastewater: Atlantic City Sewerage Company Atlantic City Utilities Authority (ACUA)	Drinking Water: –Cramer Hill and East Camden - New Jersey American Water (owned/ operated) –West of Cooper River - City of Camden, operated by New Jersey American Water under contract with the city) Wastewater: Camden County Municipal Authorities (CCMUA)	Drinking and Wastewater: City of Newark, Department of Water and Sewer Utilities	Drinking Water: Passaic Valley Water Commission (PVWC) Wastewater: City of Paterson -regional wastewater treatment provided by Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC)	Drinking and Wastewater: Trenton Water Works (TWW) (also serves Lawrenceville, Hamilton, Hopewell, Ewing)

Atlantic City	Camden	Newark	Paterson	Trenton
	New Jersey American (direct service area) (water): --“Universal Affordability Tariff” offers discount to low-income customers –“Help to Others” (H2O) provides one-time grants CCMUA (sewer): –“host community benefit” for City of Camden residents as compensation for treatment plant in city	City of Newark (water/sewer): –discount for seniors and disabled persons –NJ Shares Municipal Customer Assistance Program (MCAP) Partners	PVWC (water): –NJ Shares Municipal Customer Assistance Program (MCAP) Partners	TWW (water/sewer): –discount for senior citizens, veterans, and individuals with disabilities

COMMUNITY REFLECTION



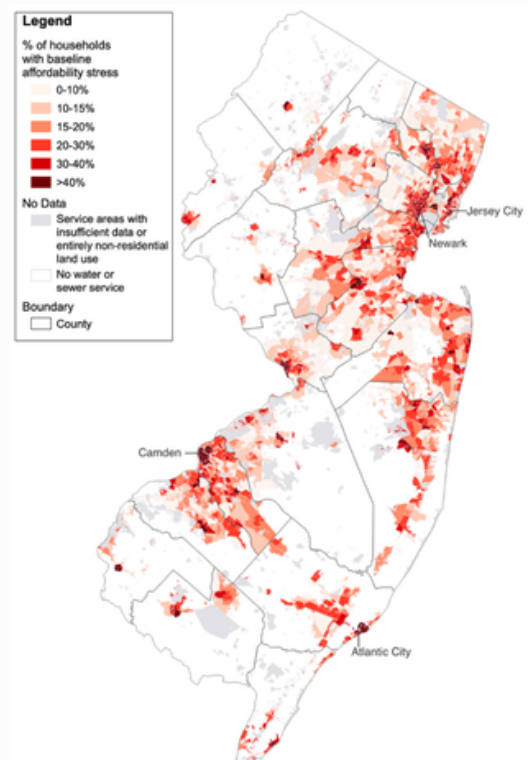
The total number of respondents and the data gathered do not support any statistical analysis.

Throughout 2025, **community partners**, including **East Trenton Collaborative, Newark Water Coalition, Camden For Clean Air, Paterson Alliance, and El Pueblo Unido of Atlantic City y Pueblos Cercanos**, examined water affordability issues and documented community experiences in Atlantic City, Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton. The partners met to learn about New Jersey's affordability issues, focusing on how rates are determined by local water and sewer utilities, and the implications of late or missed payments. They explored available assistance programs and received a list of existing resources. To elevate community stories, four out of the five partners gathered information through interviews. The community partners helped shape the interview questions and then administered them. The primary goal was to understand payment challenges, coping strategies, and awareness of the assistance program. The results should be considered qualitative, providing useful indicators of concerns, as the total number of respondents and the data gathered do not support any statistical analysis.

The partners collected 38 stories through interviews and surveys. Demographic information reported included household income levels; 34 respondents provided relevant data: 18 reported annual household incomes below \$25,000, 10 between \$25,000 and \$49,999, 5 between \$50,000 and \$74,999, and 1 between \$75,000 and \$99,999.

Household composition reports included nine households with children aged five years or younger, 11 households with individuals with disabilities, and 19 households with seniors aged 60 years or older. Household size ranged from one to five adults.

Affordability of Residential Drinking Water and Sewer Utility Services



Source: "Affordability of Residential Drinking Water and Sewer Utility Services," Jersey Water Works, August 9, 2022, <https://www.jerseywaterworks.org/latest-news/affordability-of-residential-drinking-water-and-sewer-utility-services/>.

COMMUNITY REFLECTION THEMES

Respondents shared that they face significant affordability challenges with quarterly water and sewer bills. Respondent data collected on water and sewer bills revealed considerable variability among respondents. Several participants were not aware of their bill amounts, and some noted that these expenses were covered by their landlords. One individual reported a bill of \$500 to \$600, but it was unclear whether that was monthly or quarterly, whereas the average quarterly bill among three respondents was \$220. Only 18 participants answered this question, while 10 did not respond.

Roughly 21 respondents reported a range of responses to the question on struggling to pay bills on time, ranging from always (7) to sometimes (5) to never (9).

Water quality concerns lead a majority of respondents to regularly purchase bottled water, thereby increasing financial burdens not reflected in their water bills. Twenty-two respondents indicated that they regularly purchase bottled water for household use rather than relying on tap water.

Awareness of available assistance programs is limited, with few aware of the NJ Winter Termination program⁷, the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)⁸, or the SHARES programs⁹.

A significant portion of respondents demonstrated limited awareness of available assistance programs. Specifically, 20 survey participants were unaware of the New Jersey Winter Termination Program, which offers utility shutoff protection during the winter months. Similarly, 21 individuals reported a lack of awareness regarding the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), a state-administered initiative active during 2022–2023. While four respondents were aware of the SHARES program, none had used its services. Furthermore, one participant expressed concerns about accessibility, hoping that assistance programs for senior citizens would be straightforward and not require a complicated application process, stating, “I hope there are programs that us senior citizens can easily apply for without going through a hard process.”

⁷New Jersey Winter Termination Program (WTP) prohibits water, sewer, electric, and gas utilities from shutting off service to eligible residential customers from Nov 15 to March 15. Eligible customers must be enrolled in specific programs like SNAP or facing financial hardships due to circumstances like illness.

⁸Low Income Household Water Assistance Program was a temporary program offered in NJ by NJ DCA from 2022-2023 with federal pandemic relief funding to help eligible NJ residents apply for debt relief of their water and sewer utilities.

⁹Grant based program operated by SHARES in partnership with select water providers. SHARES serves as a safety net for households in those service areas that face an emergency or crisis and need help paying their water bills.

COMMUNITY REFLECTION THEMES

Common challenges include landlord billing arrangements preventing payment plans, limited income, leaks, and competing expenses such as energy bills and emergencies.

Eleven participants reported experiencing financial hardship, leading them to cut back on other expenses or make late payments on water and sewer bills. Several respondents reported prioritizing essential services such as rent, electricity, food, and water, often at the expense of less critical bills like phone, cable, or security systems. Decision-making regarding which bills to pay first was typically guided by the perceived necessity of maintaining basic utilities and housing. The following statements illustrate some of the perspectives shared by survey participants:

“I was and am limited on money, so I always have a hard time keeping up with bills. It's very hard to choose which bill to pay. I have to split my money between the PSEG bill and the water bill.”

“During my emergency, I had to cut off phone service, security system, and cable, trying to pay off other bills. I know that we needed light and water and a roof over our head, so those bills became my first priority.”

Another respondent said, “mortgage first to have a place to stay, then pay something on other bills.”

Overall, the responses underscore the challenging trade-offs individuals face when managing limited resources to cover essential household expenses, such as water and sewer bills.

NEXT STEPS



Continue collaborating with state partners to expand water affordability solutions and promote a coordinated statewide approach.

- Convene stakeholders to advance water affordability initiatives in New Jersey
- Build public support for water assistance programs in New Jersey and advocate for policy changes that will lead to the development of affordability programs.
- Advocate for the need and benefits of statewide programs to address water rate affordability and financial assistance with water utility bills for low-income residents and utilities serving them.

- Support the development of affordability Programs by publicly owned utilities
- Utilize data transparency to monitor and promote affordability solutions
- Advocate for water utilities to institute policies and programs to reduce water shutoffs
- Reduce barriers to enrollment in existing programs

The collective goal is to advance policy and programmatic changes that will provide relief for lower-income homeowners on their water bills. This work includes cross-sector partnerships, statewide advocacy, and elevating community voices.

“Water affordability solutions lead to tangible economic and human benefits, such as preventing home loss, maintaining custody of children, putting food on the table, and taking care of medical needs. Water affordability programs are particularly crucial in reducing the racial wealth gap, as they ensure low-income households have reliable and affordable access to essential services. The ability to pay water and sewer bills is directly linked to the ability to have continued access to clean and safe water and sewer services—a basic necessity at the household level. The cost of shut-offs and living without access to running water and sewer services can add up quickly at the household level. For example, the costs of bottled water far exceed the costs of tap water. Yet, the use of bottled water is more common, not less, among income-limited households, in part due to distrust of institutions and tap water quality. Affordability programs play a vital role in leveling the playing field and breaking down systemic barriers that have historically contributed to economic disparities.”

(JWW Blog: Water Affordability Part Two: The Opportunity)



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