

Tips for speaking at a NC Utilities Commission public hearing

Preparation:

- Limit your testimony to 3 minutes (500-700 words).
- Think about why this issue is important to you and how it personally affects you or your loved ones. Gather any photos you have documenting water system problems, and documentation (such as bills or letters from the company) that show service or billing problems.
- Avoid quoting statistics unless you know the facts and can reference sources.
- Examples of types of testimony:
 - Senior citizen on fixed income who can't afford a higher monthly bill
 - Trying to save money by taking shorter showers and flushing the toilet less, but your bill keeps going up
 - Your water is brown or pressure is low, or you've experienced service problems – the company doesn't deserve more money since they're not providing good service!
- Practice your statement to get comfortable before the hearing.
- Bring your friends and neighbors

Strong public support **can** stop these proposed rate hikes. Public outcry already resulted in the NC Utilities Commission approving a much smaller rate hike for Aqua NC in 2011 – now let's do even better in 2013!

At the hearing:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early to sign up to testify and wait patiently. It's first come, first serve.
- When your name is called, you'll need to walk forward, state your name and address and be sworn in before you testify.
- Speak from your heart or read your statement if that makes you more comfortable. Remember to make eye contact with the Commissioners.
- Bring 10 copies of your written testimony for the Commissioners and staff, including any photos or documentation that you'd like to submit.
- You may be interrupted with questions from the Commissioners. Simply answer to the best of your ability and get back to your point. Don't let interruptions throw you off.
- After you finish your statement, you may receive questions from the Commissioners or the lawyers representing Aqua NC and other groups. Just answer to the best of your ability!
- Remember to thank the Commissioners for listening.

Sample Testimonies

(for more samples, contact Katie@cwfn.org)

Senior on fixed income

"I am retired and live on a pension and Social Security. I cannot afford another increase in water cost. Right now the cost of sewage, which is a set rate not subject to water usage, is about \$60 of my \$100 per month bill. How can that be? Why isn't sewage directly related to water use? I am frustrated because a private utility can request whatever it wants and the only defense is the Utilities Commission, which I feel has not protected my interests in the past. Please make Aqua justify not only these new requests but also re-look at the base rates they charge today. I would prefer having the city take over our water and pay higher taxes than be subject to the profit motives of a private company.

I have also heard that Aqua NC is asking permission to raise our rates by 5% without a public hearing from now on. How is that fair? You folks on the Commission should be able to review any plans they have for building new water and sewer pipes, and let us customers have input, and then decide if it's in our best interest each time! Please don't let them raise rates automatically – they're already high enough."

Big family trying to save water

"I have five daughters. And I tell my daughters if it's yellow let it mellow, if it's brown flush it down. I make them take 10-minute showers, and I set the timer. We have the 10-second rule in my house, which is they can rinse their tooth brush in 2 seconds, they can brush their teeth, and they better not use more than 10 seconds of water because I'm screaming at the top of my lungs. We only run our dishwasher once a week.

And I will tell you that my husband has been on unemployment for 2 years. And I have been the sole bread winner. I have 3 daughters in college, 1 in high school, and 1 in elementary school. I should not have to scream and holler because I cannot budget a water bill, and even after all this, the bill doesn't change that much."

Water quality problems (bring copies of photos or other documentation, too!)

We have lived in our neighborhood for five years and Aqua NC has a community well that supplies the water to the 100+ homes. Over these five years, we have experienced numerous issues with the quality of the water and they continue to occur to this day.

Several times a month, the water is very brown; other days it is milky and discolored. We never drink the water or use it for cooking without filtering it first. We drink mostly bottled water because we cannot trust the safety of the water.

These issues have been raised with Aqua NC numerous times and the issues continue. Please do not reward a company who supplies an inadequate product by allowing them to increase their rates and force us to pay more for a service we are not already receiving.