



Enhancements to Customer Engagement on High Bills

Briefing Document

Executive Summary

This briefing outlines the measures WSSC Water has taken to assess high bill concerns, the process by which they are addressed and updates made to WSSC Water's high bill concern process as well as additional education to assist customers in understanding bills and causes of high bills. WSSC Water engaged in several activities to improve the high bill concerns process, including:

- Implemented a multi-channel, comprehensive educational outreach effort to help customers better understand and manage high water bills through awareness, engagement, and resources.
 - Campaigns and focus areas included:
 - Wise Water Use – promoted water conservation tips and shared simple examples of how indoor and outdoor water use impacts customer bills.
 - Example: Running a standard sprinkler for one hour per week uses about 1,300 gallons of water. That's 15,600 gallons per quarter, which will add \$373 on top of your normal quarterly bill.
 - Toilet Leak Education – informed customers about various types of toilet leaks, created step-by-step video on how to check for toilet leaks and promoted our free dye tablets to check for leaks.
 - Water Meter FAQs Initiative – addressed commonly asked questions via a series of 10 educational videos.
 - Outreach tactics:
 - Paid social media
 - Earned media
 - Customer bill inserts
 - Educational materials and demonstrations at community outreach events
 - Dedicated website pages
- Created the CAP Leak Repair Program in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland which allows customers enrolled in WSSC Water's Customer Assistance Program to receive up to \$9,000 per year in water leak repair services.
- Developing a water and sewer bill calculation guide for customers; providing a clear high bill analysis process; improving high bill analysis documentation; and providing guidance on toilet leaks and meter leak indicators as documented in the General Manager's April 2025 Commission Report.
- Engaged a third-party consultant, under the purview of the General Manager's Office of Performance and Accountability, to provide actionable recommendations. Report presented at May 2025 Commission meeting.
- Development of a High and Estimated Bill Action Plan in June 2025.

Prior to process improvements and a focus on shortening resolution times, there was an extended process to review and resolve high bill concerns. We also reviewed the lack of documentation or



difficulty identifying the cause of a high bill after consumption returned to normal, which often left the customer thinking that it was an unexplained high bill. To improve transparency, customer experience, and prevention, WSSC Water began implementing short-term process changes in April 2025, medium-term system upgrades, and long-term infrastructure investments. WSSC Water is in the process of updating the Commission website to reflect these changes to the process and will publish the updated high bill adjustment process by November 1, 2026. Also by November 1, 2026, we will update the website and include communications to all customers on guidance for billing inquiries and service level targets to address high bills. Customer Care agents are also being trained to best address inquiries.

Background and Context

WSSC Water provides quarterly water and sewer bills based on actual meter readings. Most meters are read manually, which can lead to minor billing variations or estimated bills. Customers are responsible for maintaining their internal plumbing and the water service line as well as paying the charges for billed consumption and fees/other charges.

High bill concerns have ranged from slight increases to significant spikes. It was determined through the independent review and evaluation of escalated concerns that the reasons for high bill concerns has ranged from changes in rates and meter reading error to property side leaks/elevated consumption and external watering. To proactively notify customers, WSSC Water was required to send letters when usage exceeds 200% of the previous bill. These letters urge customers to investigate the cause of increased usage; however, it was determined that these letters are sent in many cases a quarter after the elevated consumption has occurred, making it difficult for both the customer and WSSC Water to pinpoint the cause if unknown. Customer Service supports these inquiries through phone or email and offers adjustments, based on the existing adjustment policies, when appropriate.

Challenges with the legacy process included:

- Multiple customer-initiated callbacks.
- Treating concerns mainly as adjustment requests.
- Inconsistent support in identifying usage causes.
- Fragmented customer interactions with different staff.
- Occasional meter reading or billing errors.
- Limited meter access, especially indoors.
- Inadequate case structure for tracking and reporting.

Previously, Customer Service Advisors (CSAs) assessed adjustment eligibility without always opening a case. Customers were often told to call back in 7–10 days after a follow-up read. This delay was due to meter limitations, as most lack hourly read capabilities. The process relied on the C2M billing system, which manages 1,000 active cases.

Short-Term Updates (Implemented)

As of **September 2, 2025**, WSSC Water introduced several improvements:



- **Every high bill inquiry now results in a formal case**, regardless of adjustment eligibility.
- **Collections and service disconnections are paused** during investigations.
- **Field activities are initiated promptly**, and customers receive a follow-up email summarizing the conversation, responsibilities, and next steps.
- **Proactive follow-up** is now standard. Customer Service contacts the customer with results, reducing delays and reinforcing accountability.

Staff received refresher training and a residential high bill checklist to guide reviews. Following a successful pilot, **Account Specialists** now conduct follow-up calls within five days, offering expert analysis and customer support. Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Medium-Term Solutions (In Progress)

In Spring 2025, Customer Service requested enhancements to the C2M High Bill Case. The upgrades were implemented in **October 2025**.

Key improvements:

- Better prompts for staff follow-up.
- Enhanced outcome tracking and reporting.
- Standardized field activities for meter investigations.
- Public-facing summary statistics and trends on WSSC Water's website.
- Automated letters to inform customers of required actions, case status, and outcomes.

Development of a **customer self-service portal**, which was paused to prioritize the case enhancement, has now resumed. The portal will allow customers to submit concerns, bypass phone queues, and track case status. Launch is expected by **Summer 2026**.

Long-Term Strategy (Planned)

The long-term goal is to prevent high bills through **smart meter technology**, enabling near real-time usage monitoring.

WSSC Water plans to retrofit or replace most of its **500,000 meters** with **Meter Interface Units (MIUs)**. This will:

- Provide hourly usage data.
- Improve access to hard-to-reach meters.
- Help customers identify and address high usage early.

A **smart meter pilot program** will begin in **late 2025/early 2026**, installing 2,000 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters. Results will be evaluated in **spring 2026** to guide next steps.



Conclusion

WSSC Water has transformed its high bill concern process through:

- **Short-term improvements** in processes, customer information, responsiveness and consistency.
- **Medium-term upgrades** to case management and customer tools.
- **Long-term investments** in smart meters for real-time insights.

Short-Term (Adopted Sept 2025)

- Case creation, follow-up, staff training

Long-Term (Late 2025 – May 2026 and beyond)

- Smart meters, AMI pilot, real-time usage



These efforts reflect WSSC Water’s commitment to transparency, customer support, and continuous improvement.