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Report - Implementation of Procedural Changes to Customer Engagement on High Bills

WSSC Water submits this report pursuant to Section 3(a)(2) of Chapter 593 of the Acts of 2025 (House Bill 1195), which requires the Commission, on or before November 1, 2026, to report to the General Assembly on the full implementation of the procedural changes developed and finalized to enhance customer engagement for customers who receive high bills.

In compliance with Section 3(a)(1), WSSC Water submitted its initial report to the General Assembly in November 2025 describing the procedural changes being developed and finalized. Since that report, the Commission has implemented significant changes to how it receives, investigates, communicates about, and resolves customer concerns regarding high water usage and high water and sewer bills.

This report summarizes the procedural changes implemented and the additional measures WSSC Water has undertaken to strengthen customer engagement, improve transparency, and provide customers with timely, understandable information when they receive a high bill that reflects higher than anticipated use.

Procedural Changes Implemented

WSSC Water has fully implemented the core procedural changes identified in its November 2025 report.

1. **Formal Case Management for High Bill Concerns**
   Every customer inquiry regarding high water usage or a high bill now results in a formal case, regardless of whether the customer ultimately qualifies for a billing adjustment or correction.

   This change provides a consistent process for documenting, investigating, and resolving high bill concerns and allows WSSC Water to track the outcome of each case.

   Customers receive written confirmation when a case is opened and closed.

2. **Protection During the Investigation**
   WSSC Water pauses collection activity and severance activity while a case is under investigation.

   This provides customers with an opportunity to work with WSSC Water to investigate high water usage and resolve the concern before collection or severance activities resume.

3. **Timely Investigation and Field Activities**
   WSSC Water promptly initiates field activities to investigate high bill concerns, including visual meter inspections and, when appropriate, meter removal for testing.

   The Commission has also established processes to ensure that field activities and their results are documented as part of the customer's case.

4. **Proactive Customer Communication**
   WSSC Water proactively communicates with customers throughout the investigation.

   Depending on the circumstances of the case, communications may include:
   - Meter readings;
   - Meter test results;
   - Information about high water usage;
   - Actions required of the customer;
   - Actions being taken by WSSC Water;
   - Information about billing adjustments or corrections that may apply; and
   - The outcome of the case.

   Customers can receive status information through proactive communication rather than relying solely on repeated phone calls or emails to check the status of their concern.

5. **Consistent Review for Adjustments and Correction**
   WSSC Water reviews each high bill case to determine whether the customer qualifies for an adjustment or correction under the Commission's Code of Regulations and the Public Utilities Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

   When a customer qualifies for an adjustment or correction, WSSC Water processes it in accordance with the applicable criteria. When a customer does not qualify, WSSC Water explains the reason for the decision and the outcome of the case.

   This process ensures consistent handling of high-billing concerns and that customers receive the adjustments or corrections for which they qualify.

6. **Automated Customer Notifications**
   WSSC Water has implemented automated letters to inform customers of required actions, case status, and case outcomes.

   These letters supplement direct customer service communication and provide customers with written information they can reference throughout the process.

7. **Case Metrics and Accountability**
   WSSC Water maintains metrics that document the outcomes of high bill cases.

   The information allows the Commission to monitor case volume, resolution, and outcomes and identify opportunities to improve the process.

Customer Education and Outreach

In addition to the procedural changes required to improve the handling of high-bill concerns, WSSC Water has expanded customer education to help customers understand their bills and identify potential causes of high-water usage.

The Commission implemented a multi-channel education and outreach effort focused on water usage, leaks, meters, and billing.

Key initiatives include:

- **Wise Water Use.** WSSC Water continues to promote water conservation tips that help customers understand how indoor and outdoor water use can affect their bills. For example, operating a standard sprinkler for one hour per week can use approximately 1,300 gallons of water, or approximately 15,600 gallons over a three-month period. At current rates, that amount of water use could add approximately $392 to a quarterly bill.

- **Toilet Leak Education.** WSSC Water developed educational materials and a step-by-step video showing customers how to check for toilet leaks. WSSC Water also promotes free dye tablets that customers can use in their toilets to help identify leaks.

- **Water Meter FAQs.** WSSC Water developed 10 educational videos addressing common questions about water meters, meter readings, and water usage.

Customer education is provided through:

- Dedicated webpages;
- Customer bill inserts;
- Educational materials;
- Community events;
- Vendor booth exhibits;

- Paid social media; and
- Earned media.

WSSC Water also developed a bill explainer that helps customers understand how usage is calculated, along with additional educational materials addressing high bill investigations, toilet leaks, and meter leak indicators.

Additional Customer Assistance

In 2025, WSSC Water created the Customer Assistance Program (CAP) Leak Repair Program in partnership with Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland.

Eligible customers enrolled in WSSC Water's CAP may receive up to $9,000 per year in water leak repair services for leaks on the owner's private property. The program helps address on-property leaks that can lead to high water usage and unexpected bills, while assisting customers who may have difficulty paying for necessary repairs.

Independent Review and Continuous Improvement

WSSC Water engaged a third-party consultant through the General Manager's Office of Performance and Accountability to provide actionable recommendations regarding high bills, customer complaints, and billing accuracy.

The Commission also developed an Action Plan for High and Estimated Bills to identify opportunities to improve customer experience, strengthen case management, and reduce the time required to resolve high bill concerns.

These efforts support continuing improvements to the Commission's customer service operations.

Continuing Improvements

Although the procedural changes required by HB 1195 have been implemented, WSSC Water recognizes that enhancing customer service is an ongoing process.

Through Operation True North, launched in 2026, the Commission continues to strengthen its customer service operations and improve customer experience.

Current efforts include:

- Training Customer Service staff to quickly and accurately evaluate high water usage;
- Improving first-contact resolution when sufficient information is available to resolve a customer's concern;
- Clearly identifying the steps required by WSSC Water and the customer when additional research is necessary;
- Establishing measurable service-level expectations;
- Simplifying webpages so customers can more easily find information;

- Improving high bill case documentation; and
- Reducing case turnaround times.

WSSC Water is also continuing the development of a customer self-service portal that will provide customers with additional information about case status and details after a case is opened.

Long-Term Investment in Advanced Metering

WSSC Water is pursuing Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) as a long-term strategy to reduce estimated bills and provide customers with more timely information about their water usage.

The Commission has converted more than 2,000 meters as part of an AMI pilot involving single-family residences and public schools in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

On April 15, 2026, the WSSC Water Commissioners authorized moving forward with AMI for approximately 500,000 meters. The Commissioners identified several anticipated benefits, including:

- Real-time awareness of leaks;
- Reduced estimated bills;
- Support for monthly billing to enable better budgeting;
- Improved access to water consumption information through the EyeOnWater app, allowing customers to monitor their usage and identify unusual consumption; and
- Improved employee safety through remote meter reading.

On September 16, 2026, WSSC Water announced that AECOM Technical Services Inc. had been awarded a five-year contract to serve as the Smart Meter Program Manager. Procurement for full implementation of the program has begun.

Separate Reporting to the County Councils

Maryland Code, Public Utilities Article,§ 25-504(h) also requires WSSC Water, by November 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, to report to the Montgomery County Council and Prince George's County Council the total number of customers in the immediately preceding year who reported bills exceeding the limits for high bill adjustments under WSSC Water's regulations.

WSSC Water will provide that information to the two County Councils through the separate reporting required by the Act.

Conclusion

WSSC Water has implemented the procedural changes developed and finalized in response to HB 1195 to enhance customer engagement for customers who receive high bills.

The Commission’s implementation includes:

- A formal case for every high bill concern;
- Written confirmation to customers when their cases are opened and closed;
- A pause in collections and severance activity while cases are investigated;

- Prompt initiation of appropriate field activities and meter testing;
- Proactive communication of investigation results and required next steps;
- Consistent review of billing adjustments and corrections;
- Written explanations of case outcomes;
- Automated customer notifications;
- Case-level metrics and outcome tracking;
- Expanded customer education and resources; and
- Operation True North (OTN): Streamline processes, improve cross-department coordination, and clarify accountability to resolve customer concerns more efficiently.

WSSC Water has also continued to strengthen its customer service operations through additional education, leak repair assistance, improved training and case management, technology investments, and the planned implementation of Advanced Metering Infrastructure.

These efforts reflect WSSC Water's commitment to providing a clear, consistent, timely, and accountable process, while continuing to identify opportunities to improve customer experience.