

MIAMI BEACH

COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee Members
FROM: Eric Carpenter, City Manager
DATE: June 11, 2025
TITLE: UTILITY COST RELIEF PROGRAM FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

RECOMMENDATION

City staff has reached out to Miami-Dade County ("County") and State offices to inquire about programs and/or grant opportunities for eligible homesteaded property owners/landlords. While there were opportunities for electric bill relief (based on income and funding availability), there were no opportunities for water bill payment assistance. Moreover, if considering funding from within the City, the City's Water and Sewer Fund does not have the authority to offer free or deeply discounted services to landlords. As such, the Administration recommends continuing to explore funding opportunities and evaluating the potential to create a relief program through the City's Housing and Community Services and Grants Department.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

On September 25, 2024, at the request of Commissioner Alex Fernandez, the Mayor and City Commission ("City Commission") approved Item R9 A ("Attachment A"), a referral to the Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee ("FERC") to discuss the creation of a program designed for homesteaded property owners, as an incentive to absorb these costs as well as the proposed water and sewer rate increase, thus, protecting low-income tenants, particularly seniors.

The discussion originates from an announcement of an October 1, 2024 County Water and Sewer Department wholesale decrease of sewer rates and increase of water rates, consequently increasing City of Miami Beach residents' water bill. Commissioner Fernandez believes that the rising of utility costs can place a significant burden on low-income residents, especially seniors and others living on fixed incomes. By providing financial incentives, landlords can potentially absorb these costs rather than transferring them to tenants.

ANALYSIS

City staff has been exploring programs and grant opportunities for landlords and tenants, as a way of maintaining affordable housing and stability to the local rental market in the City. Efforts include:

- Reaching out to the office of the Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser to determine the number of senior homeowners receiving the senior exemption in Miami Beach: According to the Property Appraiser's records, there are 769 folios and 830 senior exemptions, which include parcels that are exempt from public disclosure.
- Reaching out to County and State offices: While there are opportunities for electric bill relief (based on income and funding availability), there are no opportunities for water bill payment assistance. If there were, however, Federal funds for utility assistance could only be applied to bills in the applicant's name (since utilities are commonly billed directly to tenants). Tenants may qualify for utility relief through Housing and Urban development ("HUD"), however, landlords themselves may not be eligible.

- City staff also looked within the City's own resources: The City's Water and Sewer Fund does not have the authority to offer free or deeply discounted services. The creation of any such program would require specific provisions (income-based eligibility, criteria, duration, scope, etc.), all of which would need to be approved by the City Commission as part of a budget enhancement for the upcoming FY 2026 budget cycle. If approved, a transfer from the General Fund to the Water & Sewer Fund would be required, once the program's provisions have been determined.

The above was scheduled to be presented at the May 7, 2025 FERC meeting, however, the item was not reached. It is now scheduled for June 4, 2025.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

To be determined.

CONCLUSION

City staff has reached out to Miami-Dade County ("County") and State offices to inquire about programs and/or grant opportunities for eligible homesteaded property owners/landlords. While there were opportunities for electric bill relief (based on income and funding availability), there were no opportunities for water bill payment assistance. Moreover, if considering funding from within the City, the City's Water and Sewer Fund does not have the authority to offer free or deeply discounted services to landlords. As such, the Administration recommends continuing to explore funding opportunities and evaluating the potential to create a relief program through the City's Housing and Community Services and Grants Department.

Applicable Area

Citywide

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?

Yes

Is this item related to a G.O. Bond Project?

No

Department

Public Works

Sponsor(s)

Commissioner Alex Fernandez

Condensed Title

UTILITY COST RELIEF PROGRAM FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS