

NB 17. UTILITY COST RELIEF PROGRAM FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS  
Applicable Area:

# 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?**

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

Yes

No

**Department**

Public Works

**Sponsor(s)**

Commissioner Alex Fernandez

**Condensed Title**

UTILITY COST RELIEF PROGRAM FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

# MIAMI BEACH

## COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Commissioner Alex Fernandez

DATE: September 25, 2024

TITLE: REFERRAL TO THE FINANCE AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE COMMITTEE (FERC) FOR THE CREATION OF A UTILITY COST RELIEF PROGRAM TO INCENTIVIZE LANDLORDS TO ABSORB INCREASED UTILITY FEES, PROTECTING LOW-INCOME TENANTS AND SUPPORTING HOMESTEAD PROPERTY OWNERS AMID RISING UTILITY RATES.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Please place on the September 25, 2024, Budget Meeting agenda a referral to the Finance and Economic Resilience Committee (FERC) to discuss the creation of a program designed to incentivize landlords to refrain from passing increased utility fees onto tenants, particularly those who are on a fixed income.

Beginning October 1, 2024, the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department is decreasing wholesale sewer rates by \$0.1320 or – 3.35% and increasing wholesale water rates by \$0.2873 or 13.6%. The adjusted pass-through charges will be reflected in City of Miami Beach resident bills during Fiscal Year 2024/2025.

As we know, rising utility costs can place a significant burden on low-income residents, especially seniors and others living on fixed incomes. By providing financial incentives or tax breaks to landlords who absorb these costs rather than transferring them to tenants, we can help protect vulnerable members of our community from extra financial burden.

Additionally, I recommend that FERC explore a support program for homesteaded property owners to help them manage these increased utility costs and maintain their homes.

### **BACKGROUND/HISTORY**

### **ANALYSIS**

### **FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Does this Ordinance require a Business Impact Estimate?**  
(FOR ORDINANCES ONLY)

**If applicable, the Business Impact Estimate (BIE) was published on:**

See BIE at: <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/city-hall/city-clerk/meeting-notices/>

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

**CONCLUSION**

**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

**Was this Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481, includes a principal engaged in lobbying?** No

If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s):

**Department**

Office of Commissioner Alex Fernandez

**Sponsor(s)**

Commissioner Alex Fernandez

**Co-sponsor(s)**

**Condensed Title**

Ref: FERC - Proposal for Utility Cost Relief Program for Tenants & Property Owners.  
(Fernandez)