



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, August 19, 2025

LDF Media
media@naacpldf.org

LDF Helps Advance Water Affordability Program in DeKalb County, Highlights Need for Increased Accountability

Last week, elected officials in DeKalb County, Georgia, passed a resolution to begin implementing an income-based water debt forgiveness program which would help give full debt forgiveness for low-income DeKalb residents with past water and sewer billing debt. It is set to be fully implemented by early September. DeKalb County has become the first jurisdiction in the Deep South to begin to implement such a program following other cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Baltimore that have similar programs.

“We are in a national environmental justice crisis in which Black communities suffer disproportionately from water unaffordability. In DeKalb County alone, residents are unfairly being held responsible for over \$100 million in unpaid water utility bills,” said **David Wheaton, Policy Counsel at the Legal Defense Fund (LDF)**. “This level of burden has a major impact on people’s ability to access clean water and is particularly harmful to DeKalb County’s Black residents. We are glad the County is listening to the needs of its residents and will work diligently to ensure the promises of the water affordability resolution are upheld.”

The new resolution follows sweeping legislation passed in February 2025 to address water affordability issues and implement stronger protections against shutoffs in DeKalb County. The February resolution promised an income-based water affordability plan within 30 days. However, 6 months later, residents are still plagued with unaffordable water bills and no program to assist them.

Because of this, LDF and several local organizations – including DeKalb Water Watch, the South River Watershed Alliance, American Friends Service Committee, and New Disabled South – have been intensely advocating to ensure Black residents, families with children, seniors, and residents with disabilities have access to clean, affordable. The recent resolution takes a delayed, yet incredibly necessary step toward this goal.

LDF and community partners will continue to fight for full debt forgiveness for low-income residents and other vulnerable community members. The organizations also call on the County to establish interim protocols, such as a pause on all disconnections and threats of disconnection until all of the components of the legislation passed in February are fully functioning.

For more information on the affordable water crisis facing Black communities, [**view our Water/Color research brief.**](#)

###

Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation's first civil rights law organization. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957 — although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.