



WHAT PMAA TESTIMONY LEAVES OUT BEHIND WATER AUTHORITIES' LOW RATES LIE DOZENS OF WATER QUALITY VIOLATIONS

The Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association's recent testimony to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee celebrated low water rates charged by five Water Authorities across the Commonwealth. But comparing rates without considering utility performance is unwise and misleading.

While the rates of the five authorities cited by PMAA are lower than other water providers, their systems have also incurred **hundreds of violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act**, including dozens of health-based water quality violations. The five authorities also invest far less in infrastructure (CAPEX) compared to Pennsylvania's regulated, private water companies.

1) SAFE DRINKING WATER ACT COMPLIANCE

Total Violations

According to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) data, the five authorities cited by PMAA have incurred **hundreds of violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act**.

UTILITY	TOTAL VIOLATIONS	SINCE 2014 (10 YR)
Erie City Water Authority	192	80
North Penn Water Authority	96	0
St. Marys Area Water Authority	145	18
Mifflin County Municipal Authority	162	50
Lehigh County Authority	410	63
TOTAL	1,005	211

Health Violations

The violations include dozens of **health-based water quality violations**.

UTILITY	HEALTH VIOLATIONS	SINCE 2014 (10 YR)
Erie City Water Authority	13	2
North Penn Water Authority	6	0
St. Marys Area Water Authority	10	1
Mifflin County Municipal Authority	2	0
Lehigh County Authority	35	3
TOTAL	66	6

Meanwhile, multiple analyses of EPA data show that Pennsylvania’s regulated, private water companies have fewer water quality violations than other system owners. A 2018 review of a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that water companies in the Commonwealth are **37.4% less likely to incur a water quality violation** compared to government-run systems. In 2023, a separate analysis found Pennsylvania water companies are 10 to 100 times less likely to have a violation than municipal systems. Further, systems acquired by water companies saw their violations drop by 97% on average.

2) INVESTMENTS

Pennsylvania’s regulated, private water companies routinely **invest \$150 to more than \$200** per capita per year in drinking water infrastructure. On the other hand, according to their annual financial statements, the Water Authorities cited by PMAA invest only a small fraction in comparison with **none investing even \$100 per capita per year**.

	ERIE	LEHIGH	NORTH PENN	MIFFLIN	ST. MARYS
AVG INVESTMENT PER YEAR	\$17,402,909	\$5,798,101	\$8,462,244	\$1,833,336	\$925,930
POPULATION SERVED	220,001	270,000	91,941	26,765	19,588
CAPEX PER CAPITA PER YEAR	\$79.10	\$21.47	\$92.04	\$68.50	\$47.27

Notes: Calculations use CAPEX data from publicly available annual financial statements for years 2017-2022. For Erie and St. Marys, data for 2017 is not publicly available. For Mifflin, data for 2017-2020 is not publicly available.

BOTTOM LINE

Pennsylvania policymakers should see the full picture: low rates are meaningless if the water provided is not safe to drink or if system reliability is compromised due to a lack of investment.

Sources

- Analysis of PA data derived from Allaire, Wu, and Lall in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, “National trends in drinking water quality violations” February 2018.
- Charles River Associates, “Benefits of Private, PUC-Regulated Water Utilities in Pennsylvania” November 2023.