

March 5, 2023

To the U.S. EPA External Civil Rights Compliance Office

My name is (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy, and I am a resident of Hartford, Connecticut, and the Executive Director of the (b)(6) Privacy, (b)(7)(C) Enf. Privacy. My house, which has been in my family for generations, is in Hartford's North End. The North End of Hartford is an Environmental Justice Community, as defined by the State of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Connecticut legally defines an Environmental Justice Community as (1) a municipality on the Department of Economic and Community Development's list of distressed municipalities or (2) in a U.S. Census Bureau block group with at least 30% of the population living below 200% of the federal poverty level, excluding institutionalized residents.

I am writing to you today on behalf of myself and other Black residents of Hartford's North End, impacted by sewage discharge and flooding in our homes due to racially discriminatory behavior by the City of Hartford and Hartford's Metropolitan District Commission ("MDC") water utility. Over several months, Hartford experienced consistent rainfall that caused an extraordinary amount of precipitation that flooded our homes with water and sewage, including human waste. This flooding devastated our home. I was horrified to learn that my basement was flooded with sewage from houses throughout my neighborhood. Even when a representative from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Quality ("DEEP") and I urged MDC to act quickly to fix the flapper valve that led to the discharge, they refused to take action, and my home was flooded with an additional three feet of water.

My basement was full of antiques, family heirlooms, and personal items that had enormous personal and familial value to me. When the water and sewage flooded the space, I lost everything. What's more, the stagnant water in my basement worsened the air quality in my home, making it unlivable and unsafe. As a result, I have moved into a hotel for the last several months to try and preserve my health. The need to relocate is an enormous personal cost that is straining my budget well beyond its limits.

Even now, I don't know how much the true financial burden of this disaster is. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Quality initially covered the cost of the wastewater extraction, the disposal of items, and the power washing of the basement. However, I have been told that I will have to reimburse the state for the costs of the clean-up. I am terrified that I will be forced to bear the cost of draining and cleaning the sewage out of my basement. This could be hundreds of thousands of dollars – straining my family's resources far beyond their limits. I am stunned to have to bear this burden alone after MDC's inaction caused and exacerbated the flooding and sewage discharge in my home. While the MDC installed a backflow valve in my

basement to prevent such occurrences 30 years ago, it failed. When I went to MDC to ask for support and resources to drain the wastewater from my home, I was told that it is my responsibility to maintain the valve. However, I have heard from numerous other residents that MDC has maintained other, newer valves that were installed more recently than mine. What's more, the more I have shared my story with other community members and the press, the more that MDC has attacked me personally and refused to provide adequate support to clean up my home.

My story is not unique. I am just one of the many Black families in my community devastated by sewage discharge and flooding in our homes. After community meetings, discussions with neighbors, and collaboration with other community-based organizations, I have learned how deep this injustice is for Hartford's environmental justice communities. Too many families suffer in silence as their homes are flooded with human waste and toxic hazards from neighborhood sewers. Too many residents struggle to live paycheck to paycheck and can't afford the costly expenses of cleaning up a flood that destroys their basements. Too many children are having their schooling and learning disrupted by unsafe environmental health in their homes after a flood or sewage discharge following a storm.

While wealthier and white families can afford the costs of draining their basements or have their issues taken seriously and prioritized by local and state government officials, the experience of my community is anything but that. While many residents will be impacted by this flooding and sewage backup, the impacts will be much worse for low-income families without the disposable incomes and resources to respond to these disasters. What's more, legacies and present realities of environmental racism and housing discrimination have pushed communities of color into areas that are more likely to have weaker pipes, less responsive utility service, and fewer natural barriers to stop flooding and sewage backup. Consequently, the communities most impacted by stormwater surge, flooding, and sewer back-up tend to be communities like mine – those that are composed of people of color and low-income communities.

In the face of these egregious storm impacts and their disproportionate effects on majority Black communities in Hartford, the City of Hartford and the Metropolitan District Commission have not taken the immediate and urgent actions needed to support residents. What's more, MDC has for years systemically underinvested in updating sewage and water systems in Black communities and other Environmental Justice Communities throughout the state. As the climate crisis worsens and extreme weather becomes all the more common, we must act today to hold utilities like MDC accountable to meet the urgent needs of residents of color and low-income residents today, while also building more climate-resilient water systems for the future.

As the City of Hartford and MDC receive federal resources and support from the Environmental Protection Agency, I am writing to you today for your support to work with the MDC and hold

them accountable to address my needs and the needs of residents in Environmental Justice Communities. As MDC receives federal financial assistance, the EPA has the authority under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to investigate and prevent the water utility from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin in its programs or activities. I urge you to investigate MDC under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because I believe they have discriminated against me and other Black residents of Hartford in their construction and maintenance of our sewage and water system and in their inaction to resolve sewage discharge and flooding issues.

Thank you so much for your time, and please do not hesitate to follow up with me if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

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