

**Quarterly Report of the Independent Consumer Advocate (ICA)
For the Metropolitan District of Hartford County (MDC)
January 1, 2025 – March 31, 2025**

I. Introduction

This is the first report I am submitting as the ICA intended to summarize my activities in the first quarter of 2025. I have focused my efforts this quarter on familiarizing myself with the workings of the MDC, attending meetings of the Commission and the various committees, reviewing organizing documents and other MDC materials, meeting with my predecessors, David Silverstone and Joe Szerejko, MDC leadership and staff, numerous committee chairs and commissioners and several involved citizens. I have also connected with other individuals working in the industry attending the Water Planning Council Meetings and meeting with individuals in the nonprofit sector.

II. Issues Facing All Consumers

A. In responding to various consumer concerns I became familiar with some of the MDC policies and procedures and in so doing found several areas where I felt improvement could be made to benefit consumers. In particular I focused this quarter on the Private Property Damage Policy and the leak adjustment policy.

i. Private Property Damage Policy

The Private Property Damage Policy is MDC's written policy statement regarding payment for damage to private property. It provides separate analysis for damage resulting from a sewer backup or surcharge as opposed to a water main break. The current policy states in part that "when a water main break occurs without any warning, it is the MDC policy to pay for the cost of remediation... for property damaged by a water main break. As part of the remediation, the MDC makes the home habitable...." My interest in this policy arose as a result of a consumer landlord in Hartford whose commercial kitchen was flooded as a result of a water main break. My request to the MDC was such that this policy should be revised to address commercial consumer interests where the "make habitable" standard does not apply. I did receive in response a revised draft of this policy which included language I agree is helpful to address this concern. I am hopeful this revised policy will become operational in the near future. I also suggest that it would be beneficial to consumers if this revised policy was made publicly available on the MDC website.

ii. Leak Adjustment

While leak adjustments appear to be a prevalent concern among consumers, MDC does not have a formal written leak adjustment policy comparable to the Private Property Damage Policy. As a result it is more difficult to discern in which situations MDC policy provides for reimbursement to consumers. It does however appear that certain standards are indeed applied to leaks arising internally versus externally and reimbursement is frequently granted in accordance therewith. It also appears that MDC does have some policies regarding generating implausibility lists for large variances in consumption to identify possible leaks although I have not discerned the specifics of this process to date. I believe it would be in the best interest of consumers if the MDC were to adopt and publish a formal Leak Adjustment Policy.

Moreover, in meeting with MDC leadership I was informed that an app is being built which will allow consumers to see current data regarding the water usage at their property. I think this is an excellent development and did further request that it may be helpful to include a notification feature so that consumers could set their standard water usage on the app and receive notification when such usage is exceeded.

B. Role of Independent Consumer Advocate

I would note that I have found MDC staff and leadership to be forthcoming with information and appreciate this cooperation. Additionally in response to some discussion this quarter MDC has added a line item to the Board Meeting Agendas specifically for comments from the Independent Consumer Advocate, as separate and apart from public comment and I think this is of benefit to the consumers.

C. Consent Order

I reviewed the draft report for the Annual/Q4 Consent Order and attended the public meeting in March. As I noted at the meeting it came to my attention that there are a small number of homes where MDC has been unable to proceed with remediation work as a result of extenuating circumstances including but not limited to homes with insufficient electrical capacity to support a sump pump. I suggested at the meeting that MDC might continue to work with community partners in Hartford to see if together they may bridge this gap. I intend to pursue this issue in the second quarter.

III. Individual Consumer Complaints

I received inquiries by phone or email from over 20 consumers this quarter. Several of these complaints concerned a request for reimbursement for a leak or private property damage as noted above. I assisted several consumers in putting together a claim and/or following up on an existing claim and a few of these continue to be in

progress. I also spoke to consumers who were having difficulty paying bills and explained the Operation Fuel program. There were also numerous miscellaneous concerns raised including: social media comments by MDC staff, concern that the water bill is difficult to read, fire hydrant maintenance policies in light of the wildfires in Los Angeles, concerns over mining activities near MDC land, concerns over the lease by MDC to the Fuel Cell Energy Plant in Hartford and an issue regarding a unreleased frontage fee that was blocking a residential closing. Largely I was able to work with consumers and MDC staff to resolve most issues presented.

IV. Conclusion

I end this first quarter with a much better understanding of the people, policies and procedures that govern the workings of the MDC. As I look ahead to the next quarter I will be expanding my focus to include more attention to ongoing legislation that may impact consumers.

Sincerely,



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