

## DWM 2024 BUDGET STATEMENT

Good afternoon, Chairperson Ervin, members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and members of the City Council. I am Dr. Andrea Holthouse Cheng, Commissioner of the Department of Water Management (DWM) and I am pleased to appear before you today to present and discuss our 2024 budget proposal.

The mission of the 2,300 employees of the Department of Water Management is to deliver high quality drinking water and to efficiently manage waste and rainwater. We operate two of the world's largest conventional purification plants, 12 pumping stations that distribute 750 million gallons of water daily through more than 4,300 miles of water mains to 5.1 million people in Chicago and 120 suburbs. That's 41% of the state of Illinois.

On the sewer side, the department is responsible for the transmission of wastewater and rainwater through more than 4,500 miles of sewer mains to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago for processing.

We take this responsibility very seriously and protecting public health is our primary concern. We perform over 600,000 analyses of water per year throughout the treatment system 24/7 and adjust treatment protocols as necessary. We also monitor water quality in Lake Michigan to identify potential issues early and to protect the lake from polluters. The result of these steps is that Chicago's drinking water meets or exceeds all federal, state and industry standards including those for lead. For years, Chicago's water has tested under the U.S. EPA's benchmark for lead in drinking water.

In addition to our Equity and Homeowner-Initiated Lead Service Line Replacement Programs that were launched two years ago, we have added the Daycare Program that offers free replacements to licensed daycares in low-income neighborhoods; the Breaks and Leaks Program that replaces lead lines whenever a line sustains damage; and the Block-Long Program that replaces the lead lines of homes located along water and sewer main replacements.

Importantly, except for the Homeowner-Initiated Lead Service Line Replacement Program where owners voluntarily replace the full lead service line, all these programs are completely free to the residents. They all include replacement of the private side section of the service line. These programs also include the free installation of a water meter for homes that did not previously have one, resulting in 982 locations receiving new meters over the last two years.

With over 400,000 lead service lines installed before 1986 in Chicago, their replacement will be a huge multi-year, multi-billion-dollar effort. But it will grow Chicago's construction industry and create good new jobs for thousands. Last year, we filled 428 vacancies, the majority of whom will work on replacements.

We continue to advocate for the highest level of funding from federal and state sources to assist with lead service line replacement. While we have not yet received our allocation of the federal dollars from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we are working with the State to expand the definition of what constitutes a "Disadvantaged Community" so that Chicago can receive the maximum amount available.

Despite the number of lead service lines in the City, our drinking water is safe due primarily to the corrosion control we add to it that creates a coating within the pipe that minimizes lead leaching into the water. Any resident who has concerns about their water can call 3-1-1 and request a free test kit. The

samples are tested by an independent lab, turnaround times for results are only three to four weeks, and it is open to renters as well - all for free.

DWM's water testing program has mailed out over 104,000 kits since 2016. To promote transparency about what is in our drinking water, we voluntarily post anonymized results of these water tests on [chicagowaterquality.org](http://chicagowaterquality.org).

Throughout our work this year, we have taken several critical steps to ensure that we are administering our programs equitably while promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace. Among these are:

- Hired a Deputy Commissioner to oversee Labor Relations and Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI)
- Launched DEI training with an outside consultant and completed training for all DWM senior staff and managers. We are currently training mid-level supervisors.
- Actively participating in the City's first Equity & Racial Justice leadership cohort, including implementation of new ideas
- Partnered with DHR for ongoing annual EEO and Sexual Harassment trainings

Climate change is impacting Chicago, with more severe storms and a moving benchmark for what defines a 100-year storm that dumps large amounts of rainwater in a compressed period of time when they occur. At DWM we have been working to identify flooding solutions on the short-, medium- and long-term scales.

On a neighborhood level, we are also planning underground rainwater storage projects on side streets in the areas where not many utilities are present. These storage projects will temporarily hold rainwater surcharge, thereby alleviating basement flood risk.

Long-term regional solutions include the Area 4 project in the south and far south communities of the City of Chicago, which includes constructing a 9.7-mile-long, 20-foot-diameter deep rock tunnel to direct the surplus rainwater and sanitary surcharge to the MWRD tunnel system. The project will significantly alleviate basement flood risk and chronic flooding for more than 30,000 residences. DWM is moving into the next phase of the design and sourcing funding for this massive project.

It is our priority to promote transparency around our work. We issue an annual Water Quality Report so that residents can understand exactly what is in our water, and we post anonymized residential water testing results online. This report includes information on lead, PFAS, Chromium-6, and soon, microplastics. We have also been providing ward-specific data to your offices regarding 3-1-1 requests, capital work, and water quality requests to help support constituent services and accountability. If there is something that we are not doing right, I want to know about it so that we can fix it.

We are committed to providing the highest level of professional service to our customers and building a strong water infrastructure to meet Chicago's needs now and for future generations. I pledge to continue to work with all of you on these important water issues.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.