

# MICHIGAN STATEWIDE WATER AFFORDABILITY ASSESSMENT

**This report will develop a baseline understanding of those struggling to pay for household water across the state. It will also address key, related financial and infrastructure challenges that utilities and private individuals face in order to provide context for water affordability challenges in Michigan.**

In partnership with Michigan State University Extension and Safe Water Engineering, the University of Michigan Water Center is analyzing water affordability across the state of Michigan. All Michigan residents need uninterrupted access to safe drinking water because it is a public health necessity.

This project builds on and extends the important water affordability efforts of numerous organizations working directly with community members in Detroit over recent decades. More recently, their efforts have expanded across the state into other communities, demonstrating that affordability concerns at the household level occur in every community. Through targeted conversations with frontline community groups, water utilities, and state agency personnel, the project team is soliciting perspectives on affordability so that the report illustrates the challenges faced by all stakeholders in confronting affordability in their communities.

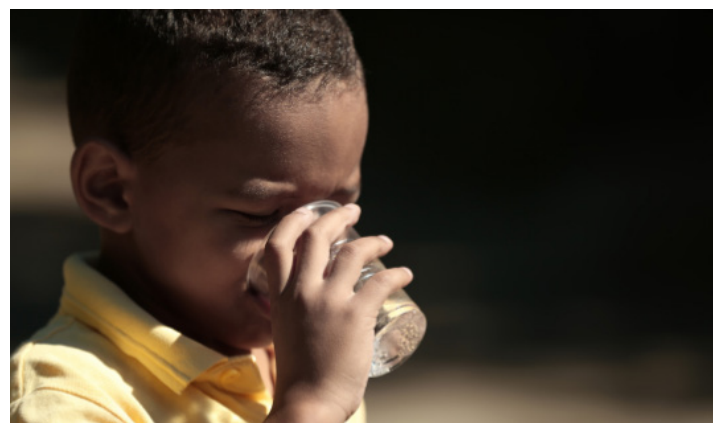
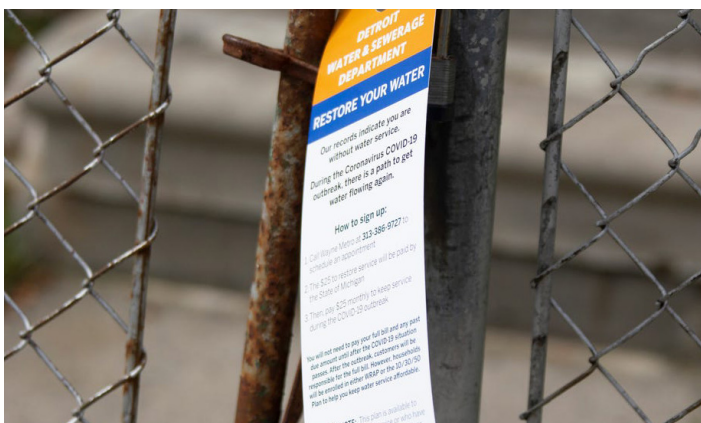
The resulting analysis is intended to quantify the extent of drinking water affordability concerns across the state of Michigan at the household level and to explore important aspects of the

affordability landscape by documenting the various challenges (e.g., infrastructure age, community size) faced by utilities in providing safe and affordable water services—drinking, waste, and stormwater.

The report will provide:

1. **Statewide Analyses** to estimate and explore the extent of water affordability concerns across the state at the household and community levels. We will achieve this by calculating the ratio of water cost to income two ways, one using reported data and the other determined from utility rates;
2. **Case Study Analyses** to explore and clarify the various relationships among utility financial health, utility infrastructure health, and water affordability in different locations. These will highlight different challenges that utilities face in providing safe and affordable water services; and
3. **Context and Important Considerations** that address relevant water affordability factors that currently lack comprehensive or readily accessible data. It will also address important considerations that provide essential context for the conversation about water affordability across the state.

The Michigan Statewide Water Affordability Assessment will provide a foundational understanding of who struggles to afford safe drinking water across the state and it will serve as a benchmark against which future policy initiatives can be measured.



Left: © Mandi Wright/Detroit Free Press via ZUMA Wire. | Right: Photo by Pixelshot for Canva.

## PROJECT TEAM



### Jennifer Read

University of Michigan Water Center

Jennifer Read has over 20 years' experience managing complex and high-performing applied research programs at the university level. As Director of the University of Michigan Water Center, she channels her passion for supporting collaborative, user-driven research that addresses Michigan's water-related policy and management needs, ranging from aquatic habitat restoration to drinking water infrastructure and pricing policy. Jen serves on several national and regional advisory groups, including the Great Lakes Blue Accounting Advisory Board.



### Elin Betanzo

Safe Water Engineering

After helping uncover the Flint Water Crisis, Elin Betanzo created Safe Water Engineering to improve access to safe drinking water through engineering and policy consulting. Her expertise spans environmental and water policy (including writing and implementing federal and state water regulations), regulatory compliance, distribution-system water quality, and harmful algal blooms. She has worked from the perspective of a federal regulator (US EPA), water utility (Washington DC), and policy think tank (Northeast-Midwest Institute), and brings her experience and extensive network to her practice.

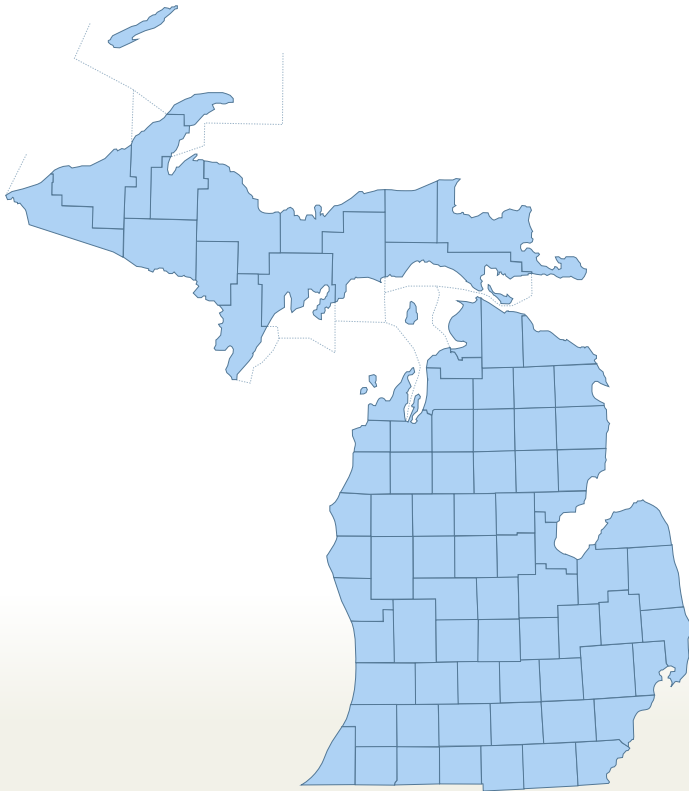


### Ritchie Harrison

Michigan State University Extension

Ritchie Harrison is the co-director of the Great Lakes Leadership Academy (GLLA) at the Michigan State University Extension. His expertise spans community and economic development, urban planning and land-use, and civic engagement, and his work is marked by collaboration and diverse civic participation. Previously, Ritchie was the community planner for the Detroit River Front Conservancy, where he led extensive planning and development efforts. He has also led programs targeting neighborhood improvement and revitalization in the City of Detroit.

**Contact:** Jen Read, [jenread@umich.edu](mailto:jenread@umich.edu) | 734-769-8898; or Ashley Stoltenberg, [astolten@umich.edu](mailto:astolten@umich.edu)



## Safe Water Engineering

