

THE HUMAN UTILITY

PROTECTING RESIDENTS' WATER SUPPLY WITH CROWDFUNDING

Project URL: <https://www.detroitwaterproject.org/>

Project Twitter: [@humanutility](https://twitter.com/humanutility)

One To Watch

- Community Strengthening
- Health
- Internet

Latia Plata, a nursing student from Detroit, knows what it's like to live without running water. When the city cut off her supply, she would go to her sister's house to shower and cook, and brought back buckets of water for her family to use overnight.

Plata is one of more than 33,000 people who had their supply cut after the city of Detroit went bankrupt in 2014, and began an aggressive campaign of turning off the taps of delinquent accounts. People were known to use their backyard as a bathroom, and to catch rainwater in trash cans. Shockingly, parents whose supply has been cut risk having their children taken away by social services.

When Code for America fellow Tiffani Bell started looking into the issue after the city's actions caused a public outcry, she quickly found there was no direct way to help the thousands of people whose right to a water supply was not protected. She developed a crowdfunding platform to address the issue, which she launched as part of Y Combinator's Winter 2015 class.

Donors can pay an entire family's balance, which can run into several thousands of dollars, or just contribute as much as they can to part-fund an outstanding bill. The site also seeks volunteers to provide services like plumbing and legal advice, and makes it easy for those whose water supply has been cut off to seek support.

The project has made a real difference, collecting over \$170,000 to help 900 Detroit families like Latia Plata's get their supply back. Bell has now launched the same platform in Baltimore and is hoping to expand to several more cities across the US. Learn how you can help at www.detroitwaterproject.org

Image courtesy of uusc4all

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