

Remarks by Stefani Pashman, CEO, Allegheny Conference on Community Development at PWSA Blue Ribbon Panel Community Forum

January 30, 2018

Good evening. My name is Stefani Pashman. I'm the CEO of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development – a nonprofit, civic leadership organization focused on improving the economy and quality of life in the 10-county Pittsburgh region. For almost 75 years, the Conference has been bringing together Pittsburgh's public and private sector leadership to address some of our region's greatest challenges. In fact, our organization was founded in 1944 to coordinate efforts to improve Pittsburgh's air and water quality.

We are here this evening to learn more about the future of the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority and the restructuring and improvement recommendations that have been issued by Mayor Peduto's esteemed Blue Ribbon Panel. I would first like to thank Mayor Peduto for the leadership he has shown in working to tackle the serious issues faced by the PWSA head on. And I would also like to thank Jerry Cohon, who time and again, has stepped up to provide the necessary leadership required to address major challenges facing the Pittsburgh region. His service in leading the Blue Ribbon Panel has been invaluable.

There's a formula for success in the Blue Ribbon Panel: an independent group of experts that worked collaboratively and incorporated community input in developing recommendations for how to fix the PWSA. It's a formula that should guide us as we move forward in this process.

The stakes are high. The PWSA, as it is currently structured, creates significant public health issues in the region and threatens our residents; businesses; and the enormous economic, environmental and quality-of-life progress that we have made in recent decades. The safety of our drinking water, the strength of our economy and our quality of life depend on swift action.

Experts agree that the PWSA failed on its core mission – to reliably deliver safe drinking water to residents. And while we're already paying the price for this failure, things can get a lot worse. One point I would like to make is that these issues have been building over many decades. No single person or administration is to blame for the situation we find ourselves in today.

The focus now must be on how to move forward.

We are very encouraged by the executive order issued by Mayor Peduto adopting the restructuring recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel that call for independent

governance of PWSA protected from political influence. Regulators and industry experts agree that this is critical to ensuring that the challenges facing the agency can be addressed in the transformational manner required. I appreciate Mayor Peduto's action on this issue and continue to stand with him and all relevant parties to advance, without delay, the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations.

Moving forward, the most relevant question at hand is what structure is necessary to ensure that safe drinking water is delivered in a reliable manner to all residents – regardless of circumstance or neighborhood – and how can we as public and private sector leaders of our region reach that objective in the shortest period of time. This question will be answered by the Board of Nominators and Board of Directors of the PWSA. The Allegheny Conference is committed to staying engaged through this process to ensure that this objective is met.

What I will say is that it is vital for the Board of Nominators to comprise individuals who are apolitical and “independent of elective politics” as this panel said, reflective of the PWSA service area in all respects, represent the community in an inclusive way, and take an open minded approach to exploring solutions to achieve the panel's goal of the “fundamental change in governance” and “continued transformation of the organization” needed for the sustainable and long-term success of the PWSA.

I'll close by saying that while the Pittsburgh region has greatly improved its image over the past several decades, it's always a good reminder that this progress wasn't a forgone conclusion. It was largely the concerted collaboration between the region's public, private, foundation and university communities – and the leadership of citizens across the region – that brought us through some huge environmental and economic challenges to the place we are today. The issues facing the PWSA, while significant, are not unsolvable. We have overcome bigger challenges.

I'm encouraged to see the level of community engagement present in this room and look forward to working together to see the PWSA become the kind of utility that's an asset to the region and its future. Thank you.