



MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN

**REMARKS OF MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT
OF THE NEXT PHASE OF THE BUFFALO REFORM AGENDA
JUNE 29, 2020**

- Today, I am announcing the next Phase of our reform agenda in the City of Buffalo. As we continue implementing the Buffalo Reform Agenda, my Administration is listening to and engaging with people and organizations across the community. We are doing this while our community is confronting three major challenges that individually would constitute a major response, but jointly represent the most important crisis our nation may have faced in the last one hundred years. The ongoing global health pandemic, the national—and now international—protests for racial justice, and the looming economic disaster that has put our City, state and nation in a precarious position and requires immediate actions that will help protect residents' health, homes, jobs and future. The Buffalo Reform Agenda, and today's announcements, aim to do this in a manner that reflects the need to achieve racial and economic justice for people who live in our City.
- Joining me today are Parking Commissioner Kevin Helfer and Chairman of the Buffalo Water Board, OJ McFoy for the July 1st rollout of two amnesty programs and the Buffalo Motorist Assistance Program that will help ease the pressure of escalating fines that disproportionately impact Black and low-income residents.
- The first is a parking ticket amnesty program which will last from July 1st to the end of this calendar year. There are approximately 56,664 parking tickets that are more than a year old. For those individuals, the City will waive all late fees associated with that ticket. People will now be able to pay the original amount due and clear the ticket from their record. Unpaid parking tickets have the potential to become a source of economic hardship when late fees become significantly more than the original ticket, often making them more difficult to pay.
- This creates a situation where the penalty no longer fits the situation and, especially for poor families, becomes another potential negative source of interaction with police if they are stopped. Additionally, people may be able to pay the original ticket but are unable to pay the extra costs so they make no payment at all, which could jeopardize their vehicle registration. That can impact job security or other life choices.
- Buffalo's parking ticket amnesty program allows individuals whose tickets are older to pay the original amount owed and clear their records.
- Our second amnesty program waives interest or late fees associated with Water bills will also run from July 1st to the end of the calendar year. The COVID-19 public health crisis has highlighted how critical water is, not just to an individual's quality of life and health, but also to keeping our entire community safe. It is therefore in our best interest, as a City, to make sure we are doing all we can to help every household keep their water turned on.
- During Buffalo's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Water Authority stopped turn offs and turned water back on, free of charge, to any resident who had lost their service due to non-payment. We performed over 200 turn-ons. Now, with Buffalo's Water Affordability program over 10,000 eligible residents can set up payment plans while also having their late fees or interest waived.
- Access to clean, affordable water is a critical component to helping end the health disparities which have historically plagued Black people and that have become especially apparent to all of us because of the COVID-19 health pandemic. With Buffalo's Pathways to Affordable Water program, City residents may be eligible for different levels of financial

assistance to lower their regular bill payments all year. This new program will help more residents maintain vital access to clean water and ease financial challenges.

- I want to encourage everyone who is eligible for these amnesty programs to take advantage of them. Economic justice is another critical component of making Buffalo a more racially equitable City and we will continue finding ways to ensure that Black and low-income residents in Buffalo have the opportunity to get ahead and lift themselves out of poverty.
- The third component of this phase of the reform agenda is the launch of the Buffalo Motorist Assistance Program, or BMAP. This new program recognizes that equipment and low-level moving violation tickets can become more of an economic hardship to lower-income residents than to others. The flat fees associated with these tickets may seem relatively small to some residents while to others they are significant. This program will allow the Buffalo Traffic Violations Agency, or BTVA, to issue fines in accordance with one's ability to pay.
- People will have the opportunity when pleading guilty to a ticket to enroll in BMAP and demonstrate their income level through a verification process and arrange a lower payment than the fine typically associated with the violation. This progressive sliding scale of fines for these types of tickets ensures that poorer residents are not financially crippled by fines while at the same time maintains a penalty structure that still dissuades this kind of driving behavior in the City of Buffalo.
- According to the Census Bureau, a little over 30% of the City's population is at or below the poverty threshold. As the economic impact of COVID-19 continues to take its toll on our community, we could see this percentage grow. The BMAP program could therefore offer relief to as many as 7,000 individuals who receive tickets. This program can help motorists who need this assistance now more than ever.
- Progressive fee scales based on a person's income and ability to pay have been shown to be more effective in collecting fines, dissuading people from engaging in dangerous motorist behavior, and avoiding late fees or additional penalties for non-payment.
- Amnesty programs and progressive fee schedules can only do so much. It is also time that employers make paying fair wages a greater priority. When residents cannot afford to pay for basic necessities like water then we, as a society, must reexamine our priorities and strive to ensure that all people are paid a living wage that allows them to not just survive but also to prosper.
- Finally, at the request of residents, I am asking the Common Council to quickly waive the 45-day waiting period for extending the suspension, until November, of the 9-4 Alternate Side parking ordinance. Because many residents are still working from home, enforcement of the alternate side parking regulations are should continue to be suspended, except for when bulk trash pick-ups are scheduled. Advisories of those dates will be circulated so residents know about them in advance and can move their vehicles accordingly.
- In the last two weeks, my Administration has changed our police procedure to issue appearance tickets instead of detaining individuals for low-level, non-violent offenses, mandated the issuance of stop receipts, giving "fix it" tickets to extend the period to one week for residents to make vehicle repairs, posted the police manual of procedure—which includes the Use of Force Policy and Duty to Intervene policy—on City websites, committed the Buffalo Police Department to participating in a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program, creating a new detail that will work to protect residents' right to peacefully protest, formally instituted a ban on chokeholds, and supported the repeal of 50-a and other state legislation that will make law enforcement more accountable and transparent. Today's announcement marks another significant step in advancing the Buffalo Reform Agenda, which through these previous actions, are reforming our law enforcement policies in an equitable and sensible fashion.
- Over the coming weeks my Administration will be making additional announcements aimed at improving the lives of Black residents across the City. The City of Buffalo will continue to take decisive action to be a leader in national efforts to rectify the historic injustices caused by racial discrimination. May God bless the great City of Buffalo and our nation as we confront these challenging times with a spirit of openness, inclusiveness, urgency and unity.