

# Senator Fights Aqua Utilities' Rate Hike Request

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**CENTRAL FLORIDA** -- One of Florida's senators is working to block a potential rate hike for 117,000 Aqua Utilities customers. The controversial company has a history of complaints regarding water quality and over-billing.

Senator Bill Nelson told WFTV when you have an issue that potentially impacts a third of Florida's counties, it's enough to get a senator's attention. And Nelson said this is not the time for a rate hike.

If you want to know what customers think of Aqua Utilities proposed rate hike, you need only ask a Seminole County resident.

"A lot of people would like to stick a well in to have better quality water," resident Bruce Beal told WFTV.

Right now, the only wells approved in Beal's Seminole County neighborhood are for irrigation. Beal doesn't even drink the water supplied by Aqua Utilities, but his water bill runs him \$250 to \$300 per month.

Now, the utility is seeking a \$3.8 million rate hike from Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC).

Monday, U.S. Senator Bill Nelson asked the PC to deny, delay or minimize the request.

"This is a time that we are just coming out of a recession and people are trying to make financial ends meet. And when their water bills go way up, that's money that they can't buy food or medicine. So that's why I got into it," he said.

The utility says the rate request is based on expenses associated with buying equipment to improve water quality, and a significant drop in its customer base. The company is seeking rate relief in Orange, Brevard, Lake, Marion, Sumter, Volusia and Seminole counties, along with several other Florida counties.

Customers in Seminole County's Chuluota community would not experience a rate hike. Yvette Baldonado still hopes the rate hike won't be approved.

"It's ridiculous. They're here to serve us and they're helping the water company," she said.

WFTV was unable to reach Aqua Utilities to determine why Chuluota residents would be exempt from a rate hike. The Public Service Commission is expected to make a decision on the request on May 24.

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