July 7, 2025

To: Executive Policy Committee - City of Winnipeg

Re: Opt-Out Program for Advanced Metering System

Good day. Let me begin by extending a thank you to the Standing Policy Committee on Water, Waste and Environment for their recommendation on June 27, 2025 to provide an accommodation, on medical grounds, to individuals who will be impacted by the installation of a smart water meter on their primary residence.

Having worked in the social service sector for the greater part of twenty years, I have observed firsthand the inception and support of individualized accommodation and inclusive participation at all levels of government. This is good news for populations identifying as having a disability or functional impairment. Although this may initially seem to be off topic, consider the promotion and acceptance of the Housing First model for vulnerable populations. The premise is simple; without a safe and secure place to call home, all other interventions aimed at societal inclusion and participation will ultimately not suffice.

Let us come back to the planned installation of an advanced metering system and the present recommendation to support and implement an Opt-Out Program in some fashion. The Housing First model applies to homeowners that will be impacted by these new meters owing to specific medical conditions or health needs. Although in possession of housing, the possibility of dwelling-places becoming unsustainable long term is a very real and frightening possibility. Keeping sustainable housing is on par with its procurement and without remediation, I fear a self-perpetuating cycle of loss and gain for those afflicted may take root.

I realize the population that I am referring to is a very small minority. Yet their unique requests and requirements are no less pressing than any other subset of citizens. Nor is the duty to provide reasonable accommodation null and void in this particular circumstance. The Water, Waste and Environment Standing Committee cites "...prior to the installation of the new meters, the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to present alternative options as described in the report, as well as an option to not have a transmitter installed on the property, to ratepayers who can provide proof of need of a medical exemption...". I concur that the latter option, omission of a transmitter and/or any radio frequency emitting components, is ultimately what is best suited to this situation; I endorse it as the accommodation to secure for any Opt-Out Program undertaken by the city of Winnipeg and request its adoption.

Outlines of existing Opt-Out Programs may limit accessibility to present properties only. That is, advanced meters already installed in new places of residence will not be retrofitted in order to provide accommodation. This is unfortunate as those affected by radio frequencies are already vulnerable; changes to the greater electromagnetic environment beyond their control may at times even necessitate a move. Therefore, I ask that the Opt-Out program established will also include a provision that supports some form of portability to those accommodated within its framework.

The recommendation from the Water, Waste and Environment Standing Committee passed on June 27, 2025 also details ratepayer requirements for obtaining medical exemptions for smart water meters. I suggest that documentation from physicians across Canada be supported and accepted in the Opt-Out Program. The individuals in question often do not have access to the specialized assessment required within Manitoba and must seek intervention elsewhere in Canada.

In closing, I have outlined my support for the proposed Opt-Out Program in addition to specific circumstances and suggestions that require attention. I believe the adoption of an Opt-Out Program is consumer-oriented, good practice and in keeping with current demands for safe and sustainable housing more broadly. Thank you for your time and attention. I would be pleased to discuss the matter further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Nadine Schroeder, BSW