**Don’t Make Flint Residents Pay for Tainted Water**, *Free Press Editorial Board, Jan. 15, 2016*

Don’t make Flint residents pay for tainted water. This would seem to go without saying, but in the madness of the Flint water crisis, even the most obvious points need explication:

[Residents of Flint should not be billed for the contaminated water that flowed into their homes for months](http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/01/11/should-flint-residents-pay-lead-poisoned-water/78643368/) while the city used the Flint River as a source.

And yet, bills have been issued, money is being collected, in a city where 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, where the water hasn’t been drinkable, and where residents have been buying bottled water for months.

It’s adding insult to public health injury. Being charged for water you shouldn’t drink.

On the long list of things that state officials should move swiftly to correct in Flint, the wiping away of this particular injustice in the city’s water crisis ought to rank near the top. Reimbursing Flint residents for the money they’ve paid for poison water just needs to be part of the massive bill the state tallies for its own negligence in this crisis.

So far, the governor’s office hasn’t addressed the issue. Officials there punted questions to the city, and no one in the city offered answers Tuesday.

But this shouldn’t fall to the city of Flint, which was under emergency management when the switch took place. It was the state’s health department that failed in July last year to warn the governor’s chief of staff of concerns about elevated lead levels among Flint’s children.

It was the state’s [Department of Environmental Quality](http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/10/19/michigan-official-federal-water-rules-not-followed-in-flint/74207204/) that signed off on the city’s water treatment plan that didn’t add the proper chemicals to Flint’s water, and used the wrong federal regulations to monitor the city’s system after it made the switch to Flint River water.

It was the state that, in September, attempted to discredit the doctor who [first revealed that Flint’s children had elevated blood-lead levels](http://www.freep.com/story/opinion/columnists/nancy-kaffer/2015/09/26/state-data-flint-lead/72820798/), instead of working to remediate the issue.

And it was the state that [dragged its feet responding to this crisis](http://www.freep.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/01/09/flint-water-snyder/78509450/) — finally mobilizing an appropriate emergency response last weekend, more than three months after that doctor exposed this serious problem.

Pushing this decision — and the responsibility to pay for refunding Flint’s water customers — to the city essentially puts the cost on the backs of Flint’s taxpayers, a galling move after the state’s actions in this crisis.

The governor has apologized, there have been resignations at MEDQ and the state has helped pay for switching back to Detroit’s water system, but these moves are only the beginning.

On the list of items the state of Michigan owes the residents of Flint, this is one of the easiest debts to pay. The state must make this right, immediately.