



Resolution Calling for the Ban of Ratio Utility Billing Systems (RUBS)

WHEREAS, with increasing frequency, residential landlords and property owners in Seattle are recouping utility charges by billing tenants via ratio utility billing system (RUBS) for master metered or unmetered utility services, either themselves or through a third party agent, instead of including such costs within the monthly rent; and

WHEREAS, RUBS bills tenants for utilities based on an *estimation* of use via a formula determined by the landlord and is ***not based on tenants' actual use***¹; and

WHEREAS, under RUBS tenants often ***pay for utilities they did not use***, including vacant units, building common areas, overheating radiators that tenants cannot control, communal trash with public access, water leaks or delayed maintenance in buildings causing inefficient utility use and ***no incentive for the landlord to maintain or repair*** utility infrastructure because tenants pay the cost via RUBS; and

WHEREAS, under RUBS there are ***no caps*** on how much of a landlord's utility charges can be passed onto tenants, with some tenants in Seattle paying 4x more in utility costs, impeding tenants' ability to plan and budget for the housing costs; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1271 in 2025 to limiting rent increases² but landlords are not ensuring that housing cost increases from RUBS are below the set rent cap limits; and

WHEREAS, landlords in Seattle are ***deliberately violating the City Code*** for Third Party Billing, are ***not providing transparency*** about how RUBS bills are calculated, and the City Hearing Examiner can provide ***no enforcement*** to ensure tenants are not being overcharged; and

WHEREAS, tenants on RUBS in Seattle have ***received water shutoff notices*** because the landlord did not pay the utility bill even though tenants are paying RUBS bills; and

WHEREAS, many jurisdictions are providing stronger ***tenant consumer protection*** for utility billing, with some ***restricting or prohibiting RUBS***³, and many others (including most of Europe) allowing landlords to recover shared utility costs ***only through transparent and strictly regulated systems***⁴ that require clear allocation rules (often set by statute), itemized

¹ <https://library.nclc.org/article/introduction-ratio-utility-billing-systems-tenant-advocates#content-13>

² <https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1217.PL.pdf>

³ [Connecticut Supreme Court. 2024. Northland Investment Corp. v. Public Utilities Regulatory Authority](#)

⁴ [Analysis of Member States' rules for allocating heating, cooling and hot water costs in multi-apartment/purpose buildings supplied from collective systems - Energy](#)

billing, document access, flat monthly fee with annual reconciliation, exclusion of vacant units and common areas, and other tenant protections; and

WHEREAS, when the City Council passed the Third Party Billing Ordinance 121320⁵ / SMC 7.25⁶ in November 3, 2003 they noted that they intend “to continue monitoring the impacts of billing of master metered or unmetered utility service, to consider the requirement of submetering and the banning of RUBS, and to review whether the provisions of this ordinance have provided a *sufficient degree of consumer protection for tenants*”.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the 43rd LD Democrats supports the coalition of tenants who have been organizing around RUBS since May 2025 and endorse their campaign to advocate for fairer utility billing practices, housing affordability, and increased tenant protections; and

BE IT THEREFORE FURTHER RESOLVED that the 43rd LD Democrats will share ways to get involved in the campaign and periodic updates on the campaign’s progress with its members; and

BE IT THEREFORE FURTHER RESOLVED that the 43rd LD Democrats call on the City Council and the Mayor’s Office to support tenant-led ideas for reform, and replace the Third Party Billing Ordinance 121320 with legislation that provides stronger tenant consumer protection, either by requiring that *all* residential utility charges that are not individually submetered must be included in tenant rental rates, or by strictly regulating shared utility cost recovery with statutory allocation rules, itemized billing, document access, flat monthly fee with annual reconciliation, and exclusion of vacant units and common areas; and

BE IT THEREFORE FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be sent to other Seattle LDs to encourage them to also support the campaign as well as all Seattle City Council members and the Seattle Mayor’s office; and

BE IT THEREFORE FINALLY RESOLVED that the Secretary of the 43rd LD Democrats report back on the response from the aforementioned recipients of this resolution at the 43rd LD Democrats General Meeting immediately following its adoption.

Submitted by Ryan Driscoll, 43rd LD Chair to the April 14, 2026 General Meeting of the 43rd LD Democrats.

⁵ <https://clerk.seattle.gov/search/ordinances/121320>

⁶ https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT7COPR_CH7.25THPABIRE