



## **San Antonio Chamber of Commerce Policy Statement The Saws Accountability Act Petition Initiative**

The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce **opposes** the "The Saws Accountability Act" petition initiative currently underway by The SAWS Act Political Action Committee. The Chamber believes the petition drive to revise the City charter is unnecessary and will undermine the well run and efficient operations of the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) administration and appointed leadership, and the petition is a "solution" looking for a problem.

Since its inception, the governance structure of SAWS has been designed to foster accountability and transparency. The Board of Trustees consists of the Mayor and six Trustees who represent every area of the City and service area. Except for the Mayor, all other trustees are appointed by the City Council for four-year, staggered terms and are eligible for reappointment for one additional four-year term. Four trustees must be appointed from four different quadrants of the City (NW, NE, SE, SW) and two trustees are appointed to represent the entire North and South sides of the City. In addition to appointing the SAWS Trustees, City Council must approve all changes in SAWS rates and any debt issued by SAWS. Therefore, the Chamber believes the onus for Board appointments and rate increases exists solely with the San Antonio City Council and not with SAWS.

SAWS is one of the largest municipally owned water and sewer utilities in the country. It serves more than 1.8 million people, including 460,000 water customers and 411,000 wastewater customers. It has remained a national leader among municipally owned utilities for more than 30 years, with top-level performance, bond ratings and conservation records. SAWS has an AA+ and AA1 credit rating, the highest bond rating in the agency's history, best in class reliability, and some of the lowest rates among the top 10 largest U.S. cities. It has been recognized nationally for its water conservation efforts. Per capita water use in San Antonio has declined by 50 percent in the last 40 years, going from 225 gallons per capita per day in 1982, to 115 gallons in 2019. SAWS was also named one of the City's Top Workplaces in 2019, the seventh time it has earned the distinction since 2011. Credit must be given to the leadership of the SAWS Board of Trustees and the fact that the utility is run by a competent CEO who has surrounded himself with a deep bench of professionals with expertise in safety, customer affordability, environmental impact and sustainability, reliability, security, and resilience.

Criticism that SAWS threatens the protection and conservation of the Edwards Aquifer is unfounded. Rather SAWS has carried out the City Council's mission to diversify our city's water supply. SAWS has dramatically reduced the area's reliance on the sensitive Edwards Aquifer by developing new sources of water, including Vista Ridge. In 1992, the area received 100 percent of its drinking water from the Edwards Aquifer, and that number has dropped to 58 percent today. The result is that San Antonio now has water security for at least the next 60 years and nine potable water sources, meaning it is very unlikely that SAWS will need to pursue a billion-dollar project for decades. In fact, there are zero projects listed in the SAWS FY 2021 Capital Improvement plan that equal to or exceed \$1 billion. Further, an independent audit would be costly and would ultimately result in higher utility rates for commercial and residential customers alike.

Therefore, the Chamber believes that a revision to the City charter to alter the SAWS governance structure and call for an independent audit of projects valued at more than \$1 billion, including Vista Ridge, is needless and unwarranted.