

CHEATED

FROM FRONT PAGE

many years, provided millions of dollars in coal severance money to our Commonwealth, and when they need help, unfortunately, this time they don't get it."

McCool stressed that his objection was not directed at the bill's sponsors or those who worked on it.

"I'm not saying no to anybody who got the funds because you deserve that," he said. "But I cannot just sit back and say, 'I accept what has been done,' knowing that Martin County has been the poster child for water and wastewater, and they do not receive a penny of these funds."

The WWATERS program, established through 2024 legislation, set aside \$150 million to aid the state's poorest and most distressed water and wastewater systems, with \$75 million to be distributed in the 2025 General Assembly and another \$75 million in the 2026 session. The Kentucky Infrastructure Authority (KIA) oversees the program, scoring and ranking eligible applicants before presenting the list to the General Assembly for consideration in a competitive process.

Among the 12 evaluation criteria, two significant factors include notices of violation under the Safe Drinking Water Act or Clean Water Act within the past year and a water loss rate exceeding 30%.

Following McCool's statement, the Mountain Citizen reviewed the KIA scoresheets for the Martin County Water District, uncovering that KIA had omitted 9 points for water loss (which exceeded 68%) and another 6 points for a notice of violation issued Feb. 14, 2024.

The district had originally scored 49 points, but with the additional 15 points, its final score should have been 64—placing it ahead of some projects that made the

award list.

The discovery shocked water board members and county officials.

"I am very disappointed," Martin County Judge/Executive Lon Lafferty said. "We have to have this corrected."

Lafferty's executive staff has launched an investigation into the discrepancy.

Nina McCoy, chairman of Martin County Concerned Citizens and a member of the water board, also expressed her frustration.

"Martin County was definitely cheated out of this opportunity to receive much-needed funding for our water system," McCoy said. "There are several categories in the scoring where we should have gotten more points. One obvious category was that we were given 0 points for water loss, for which we have been under scrutiny from the state since 2002 and about which we have had to report to the Public Service Commission monthly since 2018."

McCoy thanked McCool for speaking out and shared her hope that he and Senator Phillip Wheeler would work to rectify the error.

"I really appreciate Representative McCool standing up for us and voting against this when he saw that Martin County got no funding," McCoy said. "I hope he and Senator Wheeler will help us find out what can be done to fix this grave injustice to our county."

Sandy Williams, director of the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, responded to inquiries via email Monday, stating that monthly water loss reports were used to determine that Martin County's water loss was "less than 30%."

Regarding the notice of violation, Williams wrote: "The law only allows points for a NOV which was entered into within the past year."

However, records in-

dicade otherwise. Martin County's water loss rate never dropped below 60% in 2024 and reached as high as 78%. The district's annual report, published on the Kentucky Public Service Commission website, recorded an average water loss of 68% for the previous year.

Additionally, Martin County received a notice of violation on Feb. 14, 2024, for turbidity, a violation documented on the Kentucky Division of Wa-

ter's website.

Water board chairman Tim Thomas said he is conducting a deeper review of all Martin County scores in the competitive process.

Senator Phillip Wheeler said Tuesday that he was aware of the situation and was looking for a resolution.

HJR30 reached the Senate Appropriations & Revenue Committee on Friday.

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FOR MORE INFO

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Martin County

2024-25 Head Start/State Funded Pre-School Sign-Ups are Here!!

It's that time of year again to get your child signed up for Head Start/State Funded Pre-School Sign-Ups. If you have a child that will be 3 or 4-years-old by August 1st, 2024, get them signed up!

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