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**Defend Black Voters Coalition Holds Webinar for DTE Shareholders on
Crisis Created by DTE Leadership’s Secretive and Reckless Political
Spending**

Webinar Precedes Shareholder Meeting Where Proposal on Political Transparency and
Director Elections are on the Ballot

Recording of shareholder presentation available [HERE](#).

DETROIT – Defend Black Voters, a Michigan-based coalition that is fighting DTE Energy’s negative impact on democracy and civil rights, held a webinar with DTE shareholders Tuesday afternoon. Industry experts as well as elected and community leaders made the case to pass a shareholder resolution on lobbying transparency at the upcoming May 4th annual shareholder meeting and vote against the directors charged with political spending oversight.

Speakers from diverse perspectives—including Abraham Aiyash (Michigan House Majority Floor Leader), Dorian Warren (Co-President, Community Change Action), Ponsella Hardaway (Co-Chair, Defend Black Voters), Renaye Manley (SEIU), Karlee Weinmann (Energy & Policy Institute), John Keenan (AFSCME), and Sonja Bonnett (Mothering Justice Action Fund member-activist and DTE ratepayer) illustrated how DTE’s irresponsible and poorly overseen political spending program has led the company to a reputational crisis with financial repercussions.

In light of the financial and reputational risks highlighted by speakers, Defend Black Voters has reached out to shareholders to call on them, in the upcoming proxy vote, to support Proposal 7 (calling for lobbying accountability and transparency) and to vote against the DTE Energy Directors David Thomas, Gary Torgow, Mark Murray, and David Brandon, all of whom are current or recent members of the board committee in charge of political spending oversight. (You can find a copy of the letter [here](#).)

Warren, who facilitated the webinar, said “The board of directors has failed both shareholders and community stakeholders. They have a responsibility to ensure that DTE’s political activity and spending are aligned with the company’s public rhetoric

and with its own policies. And as the leaders of a company that provides a vital public service, they owe it to the community and to democracy to hold DTE accountable.” Defend Black Voters identified DTE as one of the largest contributors in the state to right-wing extremist lawmakers who attempted to use the big lie of voter fraud to pass voter restriction laws that make it disproportionately harder for Black and low-income people to vote.

Hardaway said, “We decided to follow the money. We found out that DTE’s PAC, which is controlled by the same company that told the public that Black Lives Matter and that it stands behind voting rights, was one of the top contributors to these lawmakers. We were furious and we knew the public would be too. Michiganders already suffer the highest electric rates and the worst power outages in the Midwest. Then we come to find out that this company is taking our money and giving it to politicians trying to silence my voice. We decided to hold companies like DTE accountable to put their money where their mouth is.”

Last year, through door-to-door canvassing, the Defend Black Voters coalition educated tens of thousands of ratepayers on the issues of poor service and hypocritical political spending, calling on them to get involved in the fight to stop the utility commission from granting DTE another rate hike. The coalition moved the commission to hold their first public hearing on a rate case and to deny 92% of DTE’s requested \$388 million rate hike - the largest disallowance of a rate increase DTE has experienced in at least two decades.

Rep. Aiyash said, “We need to know where all the money from previous rate hikes – billions of dollars -- has gone, and why hasn’t service improved? We pay more, quality goes down and profits go up – that’s a lose-lose for customers.”

Aiyash also highlighted Attorney General Dana Nessel’s efforts to bring transparency to DTE political spending as well as the legislative hearings convened in March on DTE’s high rates and poor service.

Weinmann contextualized DTE’s reputational crisis within a national context of other high profile scandals related to political spending at FirstEnergy and Florida Power and Light.

Weinmann said, “When monopoly utilities engage in dark money spending to influence public policy and elections, it’s not just the public that bears risks – utility shareholders do too. Fallout from political corruption scandals can continue for years due to utilities’ unique position as investor-owned regulated monopolies. By refusing to more fully disclose its political spending and associated activities, DTE Energy continues to erode public trust and expose its shareholders to undue risk.”

Keenan spoke on the growing movement of investors who are holding companies accountable for their political spending.

“DTE’s current disclosure allows it to hide payments to social welfare groups like Michigan Energy First and Detroiters for Change. As FirstEnergy shows, this is a huge risk for utility shareholders. To reduce the risk of secret spending and bribes, all utilities should be required to disclose all payments to 501(c)(4) organizations.” **Keenan said.** “Shareholders like Vanguard and BlackRock need to shine a light on DTE’s dark money spending.”

Bonnett said, “As Detroit residents, my family and I have been through seemingly countless prolonged DTE power outages. We’ve had multiple refrigerators full of food go bad and suffered for days on end in the sweltering summer with no air conditioning. While I was infuriated to learn about DTE’s political spending, I was not surprised. That’s why I, along with many others, have chosen to stand up to DTE.”

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The Defend Black Voters Coalition—a multi-racial coalition with the shared value that we must build a democracy in which everyone, regardless of race, gender, or income, has the right to an equal say in what happens in our communities—is standing up against the corporate attack on democracy for all. Members of the Defend Black Voters Coalition include: Michigan People’s Campaign, MOSES Action, Detroit Action, Mothering Justice Action Fund, Emergent Justice, Michigan League of Conservation Voters, Community Change Action and Color of Change. Learn more about The Defend Black Voters Coalition at our website: defendblackvoters.org