

## 2024 WMU Scholarship Winner Essay - by Maycee Gustafson

Willmar has been the only town that I have ever lived in, as I was born and raised here. I know that I use electricity in everything I do and likely have used it every single day since I was born 18 years ago. It is such an important aspect of my life and I cannot even begin to imagine how different the world would feel without it. Having reliable, sustainable, and affordable utility service is vital to the way our society functions. Being able to trust my utilities, such as electricity, is essential to sustaining an easier, safer and at ease lifestyle. Both of my parents are teachers, so affordability is a huge factor for my family when it comes to services and electricity costs. For my family, being able to pay our utilities bills at a reasonable price, means that we are able to use that extra money to purchase other things that we either need or want. Ever since I can remember, there has not been a day where I have been without running water, electricity or heat. That means that Willmar Municipal Utilities has always been a reliable source to not only my family, but to the whole community of Willmar. I think it is beneficial for a city to maintain local control of its utilities. It is important because then these businesses, such as Willmar Municipal Utilities, know their customers. Since it is a locally run company, the connections between the customers are stronger and more personal. Whereas if it was a national corporation, their clientele are nothing more than numbers on a screen, instead of humans, like a local company thinks of their customers. Another beneficial aspect of a company keeping local control of their utilities is that financially it's better for the community as well. It can create more job opportunities for people within our community, which can therefore help to stimulate the local economy by increasing the amount of money spent within our community. Not only this, but customers and citizens can get some say in what the utility company does. Unlike a national company, customers get to select and decide what they want from their local business through

voting, utility meetings, public meetings and others. Willmar Municipal Utilities makes life easier for its customers. One of the ways that they do this is by offering multiple ways of payment, specifically having an auto payment option. Clients don't need to stress about receiving their bill, then filling out a payment and then finally sending it in the mail, a long and unnecessarily complicated process. The ability to pay online, and sign up for the bill to pay itself automatically, relieves stress from many peoples lives. WMU provides reliable service to their customers by ensuring quality care and utilities. By doing so, their clients never have to concern themselves over if they will be without electricity or water, therefore putting customers at ease. Being without utilities would be a nearly impossible challenge for most people, and is almost scary to imagine, given that every person in this world depends on utilities for their everyday lives. Our local utilities, WMU, provide this reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy source to all its customers making life easier for for the the whole community.