



May 20, 2020

Senator Holly Mitchell  
Chair, Senate Special Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee on Covid-19 Response  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski  
Chair, Senate Budget Sub-Committee #2 on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Assemblymember Ting  
Chair, Assemblymember Budget Sub-Committee #6 on Budget Process Oversight and Program Evaluation  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom  
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub-Committee #3 on Resources and Transportation  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Shirley Weber  
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub-Committee #5 on Public Safety  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Urgent Request -- Take Immediate Actions to Maintain Access to Water For All Californians During COVID-19 Outbreak**

Dear Senator Mitchell, Senator Wieckowski, Assemblymember Ting, Assemblymember Bloom and Assemblymember Weber:

As organizations that work directly with frontline communities, we write to urge you to authorize emergency steps to maintain and restore access to water in vulnerable communities as part of the COVID-19 emergency budgetary response. We are seeing an enormous increase in need in the communities we work with that far outstrips existing resources.

**We applaud Governor Newsom's decision in last week's May budget revise to continue critical investments in safe drinking water for low-income communities. This, in addition to his April 2 action issuing Executive Order N-42-20, which placed a statewide moratorium on water shutoffs and required reconnections for Californians whose water access had been terminated due to non-payment on or after March 4, 2020.** We are grateful for the Governor's leadership and for the leadership of his team inside the Governor's

Office, at the California Environmental Protection Agency and at the State Water Resources Control Board.

**To build upon the foundation provided by the Executive Order and secure access to safe water for all Californians during the COVID-19 outbreak**, we urge the legislature to take the following funding and related policy actions:

- **Provide emergency funding** from the General Fund to California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the State Water Resources Control Board to expand emergency drinking water distribution and delivery programs so that all Californians have access to drinking water during this crisis; and to offer emergency assistance to small water systems impacted by nonpayment of water bills or to meet other emergency needs during the state of emergency.
- **Provide contract flexibility** authority to Cal-OES and the Water Board to ensure speedy allocation of available funding -- including advance pay authority, oral contract authority, and direct pay authority for emergency interventions.
- **Prohibit water and wastewater utility late fees and fines.**
- **Require immediate restoration of water service** to all occupied households impacted by water shutoffs due to nonpayment that took place prior to March 4, 2020 (which were not covered by Executive Order N-42-20) and authorize the State Water Resources Control Board to enforce service restoration.
- **Provide the State Water Resources Control Board with statutory authority to assist low-income households** with water utility bill payments via low-income rate assistance programs, extended repayment plans, and other necessary water assistance programs. This will allow the Board to act quickly to assist communities if funding becomes available.

This crisis highlights the need for a comprehensive program to address the long-term challenge of water affordability. While the establishment of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund was an important first step from the Legislature to address failing water systems, there remains an urgent need to create a low-income rate assistance program for water, like those already in place for energy and telephone service. The State Water Resources Control Board submitted the framework for such a program to the Legislature in January, as required by the Legislature in AB 401 (Dodd, 2015).

Finally, we urge the Budget Committees to **protect access to safe water as part of implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)**. Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) that result in thousands or tens of thousands of Californians losing access to water -- which many if not most of the GSPs in the Central Valley will cause based on our analysis -- threatens to undermine the Legislature's commitment expressed in the passage of SB 200 to provide safe and affordable drinking water for all Californians. State funding for SGMA community engagement efforts which expires this year, must be continued, and the Department of Water Resources and the State Water Board must demonstrate that they have

the resources (and appropriate internal resource prioritization) to rigorously analyze all GSPs for potential impacts to water quality and quantity.

California can, and must, continue to lead on access to safe and affordable drinking water. The health of our communities depends on it, as does the continued success of the state's efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 by urging Californians to shelter-in-place and wash their hands.

We urge your immediate action to protect access to water for every Californian during the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,

Alexander Harnden, Policy Advocate, Western Center on Law & Poverty

Andy Levine, Deputy Director, Faith in the Valley

Angelica Salceda, Staff Attorney, ACLU of California

Arnie Sowell Jr., Executive Director, NextGen California

Ashley Crystal Rojas, Executive Director, Fresno Barrios Unidos

Aysha Massell, Director, California Integrated Water Systems, American Rivers

Betsy Reifsnider, Sacramento Policy Associate, Mono Lake Committee

Bill Allayaud, Calif Director of Government Affairs, Environmental Working Group

Bruce Reznik, Executive Director, Los Angeles Waterkeeper

Caroline Ferrell, Executive Director, Center for Race, Poverty & the Environment

Chione Lucina Muñoz Flegal, Managing Director, PolicyLink

Chuck Mills, Public Policy Director, California Releaf

Cindy Clark, Manager, California Policy, Ceres

DeAngelo Mack, Director of State Policy, Public Health Advocates

Don McEnhill, Executive Director, Russian Riverkeeper

Evan Minton, California State Policy & Programmatic Manager, Voices for Progress

Garry Brown, Founding Director, Orange County Coastkeeper/Inland Empire Waterkeeper/Coachella Valley Waterkeeper

Genoveva Islas, Founder & CEO, Cultiva la Salud

Jackie Rutheiser, Senior Policy Advocate, California Alliance of Child and Family Services

Jennifer Clary, Water Programs Manager, Clean Water Action

Jennifer Kalt, Director, Humboldt Baykeeper

Jessi Snyder, Community Development Manager, Self-Help Enterprises

Jim Lindburg, Legislative Director, Friends Committee on Legislation of California

J. Pablo Ortiz-Partida, Ph.D., Western States Climate and Water Scientist, Union of Concerned Scientist

J. Stacey Sullivan, Policy Director, Sustainable Conservation

Juan Altamirano, Associate Director of Policy, Audubon

Juliet Christian-Smith, Ph.D., Senior Program Officer, Water Foundation

Kassandra Hishida, Coordinator, Community Alliance for Agroecology

Kevin D. Hamilton, Co-Director, Central California Asthma Collaborative

Kimberly McCoy, Program Director, Fresno Building Healthy Communities

Kira Redmond, Executive Director, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper

Lucas Frerichs, Associate Director of State Policy, The Nature Conservancy

Mark E. Carlson, Lutherans Restoring Creation - California

Matthew Baker, Policy Director, Planning & Conservation League

Matt O'Malley, Executive Director & Managing Attorney, San Diego Coastkeeper

Melissa Romero, Legislative Affairs Manager, California League of Conservation Voters

Michael Rincon, Policy Researcher, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Los Angeles

Nancy Halpern Ibrahim, Executive Director, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation

Nayamin Martinez, Director, Central California Environmental Justice Network

Noe Paramo, Director of Sustainable Rural Communities Project and Legislative Advocate, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation

Pablo Garza, California Political Director, Ecosystems, Environmental Defense Fund

Phoebe Seaton, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Rachel Zwillinger, Water Policy Advisor, Defenders of Wildlife

Regina Banks, Lutheran Office of Public Policy- California

Dr. Roy Wilson, Executive Director, Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center

Samuel Molina, CA State Director, Mi Familia Vota

Sarah Hutchinson, Policy Director, Interim Co-Executive Director, ACT for Women and Girls

Sean Bothwell, Executive Director, California Coastkeeper Alliance

Sergio Carranza, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido CDC

Steve Fleischli, Senior Director for Water Initiatives & Senior Attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council

Steve Shimek, Executive Director and Founder, The Otter Project and Monterey Coastkeeper

Susana De Anda, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Community Water Center

Sylvia Chi, Esq., Policy Director, Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Tara Moran, Stanford University (signing in individual capacity)

Torri Estrada, Executive Director and Director of Policy, Carbon Cycle Institute

Veronica Solis, Member, la Asociación de Gente Unida por el Agua (AGUA)

CC:

Vice-Chair Senator Jim Nielsen, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

Vice-Chair Jay Obernolte, Assembly Budget Committee

Secretary Jared Blumenfeld, California Environmental Protection Agency

Deputy Secretary Kristin Peer, California Environmental Protection Agency

Secretary Wade Crowfoot, California Natural Resources Agency

Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel, State Water Resources Control Board

Member Laurel Firestone, State Water Resources Control Board

Speaker Anthony Rendon, California State Assembly

Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins, California State Senate

Deputy Cabinet Secretary Christine Hironaka, Governor's Office

Deputy Legislative Secretary Rachel Wagoner, Governor's Office

Central Valley Deputy Regional Director Maria Herrera, Governor's Office External Affairs

Executive Director Eileen Sobeck, State Water Resources Control Board

Chief Consultant Christian Griffith, Assembly Budget Committee

Staff Director Joe Stephenshaw, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

Chief Deputy Director for Budget Vivek Viswanathan, Department of Finance