



Carbon Cycle Institute





American  
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Association.



WESTERN CENTER  
ON LAW & POVERTY



April 15, 2020

The Honorable Holly Mitchell  
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
State Capitol Building, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget  
State Capitol Building, Room 5019  
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Dear Senator Mitchell and Assemblymember Ting:

As organizations that work directly with frontline communities, we write to request you take immediate 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 April 2 action issuing Executive Order N-42-20, which put into place 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 to the leadership of his team inside the Governor's Office, at the California Environmental Protection Agency and at the State Water Resources Control Board.

**And now it is time to take further urgent action to build upon the foundation provided by the Executive Order, in order to secure comprehensive access to safe water for all Californians during the COVID-19 outbreak.** We urge the following actions be taken as part of the COVID-19 emergency budgetary response:

1. Require immediate restoration of water service to all occupied households impacted by water shutoffs that took place prior to March 4, 2020 (which were not covered by Executive Order N-42-20).
2. For any occupied households who lost water on or after March 4 and still have yet to be reconnected, require immediate reconnection and conduct oversight and enforcement as necessary.

3. Provide emergency funding to California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the State Water Resources Control Board to establish emergency drinking water distribution and delivery programs to ensure that all Californians, especially those without safe tap water and those experiencing homelessness, have access to drinking water during this crisis.
4. Provide emergency funding to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the State Water Resources Control Board 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.
5. Provide the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the State Water Resources Control Board with contract flexibility authority to ensure they can allocate funding quickly -- including advance pay authority, oral contract authority, and direct pay authority.
6. Direct the State Water Resources Control Board to suspend payments on state revolving fund loans for small water systems serving disadvantaged communities.
7. Provide the State Water Resources Control Board with statutory authority to extend water shutoff protections for low-income households as necessary.
8. Prohibit water and wastewater utility late fees and fines.
9. 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.

Finally, 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).

Other states like Michigan have already taken many of these actions. For example, Michigan ordered the restoration of water service for all occupied households. 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

Brandon Dawson, Policy Advocate, Sierra Club California

Bruce Reznik, Executive Director, Los Angeles Waterkeeper

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

Cha Vang, Executive Director, Hmong Innovating Politics

Chione Lucina Muñoz Flegal, Managing Director, PolicyLink

Chuck Mills, Public Policy Director, California Releaf

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Don McEnhill, Executive Director, Russian Riverkeeper

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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

Jamie Morgan, Government Relations Regional Lead, American Heart Association

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

Juan Altamirano, Associate Director of Policy, Audubon

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

Kira Redmond, Executive Director, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper

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

Kimberly McCoy, Program Director, Fresno Building Healthy Communities

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

Nayamin Martinez, Director, Central California Environmental Justice Network

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

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

Rachel Zwilling, Water Policy Advisor, Defenders of Wildlife

Rico Mastrodonato, Senior Government Relations Manager, The Trust for Public Land

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

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