



July 3, 2017

The Honorable Bill Quirk
 Chair, Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials
 1020 N Street, Room 171
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 623 (Monning) -- SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Quirk:

The following organizations write in **support** of SB 623 (Monning), which would create a new Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund to ensure all Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water.

Safe and affordable drinking water is a fundamental human right enshrined in California law, but one that is still not realized for too many Californians. Critical drinking water needs still remain unresolved, including;

- The California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) has found that hundreds of communities are unable to consistently provide safe drinking water, some for a decade or longer.¹
- High treatment costs put clean drinking water out of reach for many disadvantaged communities, especially those with small and lower income ratepayer bases. Many residents of these communities are forced to pay both a water bill (for unsafe drinking water) and for bottled water.
- In other cases, high drinking water treatment costs results in unaffordable and burdensome water rates for residents of disadvantaged communities.
- The State Water Board data does not include the nearly 2 million Californians not served by a public water system, whose wells have few regulatory requirements and are not eligible for most assistance programs, leaving them particularly vulnerable to unsafe drinking water.

The State Water Board has for years called for the creation of a sustainable funding source to support safe and affordable drinking water needs. In particular, the greatest barrier preventing communities from providing safe drinking water is the lack of a continuing funding source to support ongoing operations and maintenance costs for drinking water treatment. **SB 623 creates a new Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund to provide an ongoing source of funding to ensure all Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water.** The Fund will:

- Be housed at the State Water Board in its Office of Sustainable Water Solutions, which is well situated to leverage other sources of existing or new funding as well as coordinate with the newly created multi-disciplinary technical assistance program focused entirely on the needs of small disadvantaged communities;
- Prioritize drinking water funding around urgency of need. The bill requires the State Water Board to work with a multi-disciplinary stakeholder group that will annually develop a needs assessment and a publicly approved fund implementation plan, and;
- Identify state small and domestic well owners at risk of unsafe drinking water, and set requirements for water quality testing for state smalls and individual domestic wells based on local water quality conditions;
- Limited enforcement protection for agricultural dischargers conditioned on both targeted funding to communities impacted by nitrate contamination and compliance with regulations designed to reduce nitrate loading.

SB 623 represents a historic effort to finally guarantee California's Human Right to Water law. There is no human need more fundamental than drinking water, yet water is treated differently than many other utilities in that access is not guaranteed. In the sixth largest economy in the world, we can and must ensure that all Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water. For this reason and all the other reasons mentioned above, we strongly urge your support of SB 623.

¹ 2017 State Water Resources Control Board, Human Right to Water Web Portal.

For questions or more information, please contact either Jonathan Nelson, Policy Director at Community Water Center (jonathan.nelson@communitywatercenter.org), Jennifer Clary, Water Program Manager at Clean Water Action (jclary@cleanwater.org), or Phoebe Seaton, Co-Director at Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (pseaton@leadershipcounsel.org).

Sincerely,

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