





September 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515



The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator from California
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kamala Harris
U.S. Senator from California
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Include Urgently Needed Funding for Water Infrastructure and Water Affordability Needs in Next Congressional Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Senators Feinstein and Harris, and Members of the California Congressional Delegation:

Our organizations collectively represent both California frontline communities as well as over 500 California water agencies and other water and environmental stakeholders. In this time of crisis, we have come together to urge the California Congressional Delegation to include funding for urgent water infrastructure and water affordability needs as part of the next federal stimulus package or other pending Congressional actions.

Drinking water concerns – and the importance of access to safe and affordable drinking water – have only grown more urgent over the last several months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Water and wastewater agencies (in both rural and urban communities) need federal assistance to cover the projected annualized losses of \$30.7 billion from revenue declines and delinquent bills so that essential utility workers can ensure no interruption in service.¹ The situation is dire for low-income families too. A recent report found more than 2 million Americans currently lack access to running water and basic sanitation across blue and red states alike.² And a wall of utility water debt for low-income families is building.

Water is an untapped economic engine for the nation. Our nation's water infrastructure is crumbling. Federal funding for water has declined for decades. Water projects can be found in every congressional district in the country. And a recent report by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) found that fully funding our water infrastructure needs would create nearly 800,000 new jobs by 2039.³

There is broad public support for water investments. A recent poll found that 84% of voters support funding water systems for small towns and communities, while 79% support assistance to families struggling to pay water bills.⁴

¹ https://www.nacwa.org/docs/default-source/resources--public/water-sector-covid-19-financial-impacts.pdf?sfvrsn=98f9ff61_2

² <https://closethewatergap.org/>

³ http://www.uswateralliance.org/sites/uswateralliance.org/files/publications/The%20Economic%20Benefits%20of%20Investing%20in%20Water%20Infrastructure_final.pdf

⁴ <https://f.hubspotusercontent10.net/hubfs/6000718/Water%20Hub/Water%20Hub%20poll%20Aug.%202020.pdf>

With this in mind, we urge your support for the water-related provisions of the HEROES Act. We also urge you to include the following as part of any new federal stimulus package or other pending water or infrastructure-related Congressional actions that is acted on:

1. \$100 billion in new funding over five years for Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, with at least 20 percent of the new funding distributed to disadvantaged communities as additional subsidization (grants) rather than loans and eligibility for the new funding for all water systems, regardless of their organizational structure.
2. At a minimum include the \$1.5 billion in water affordability funding as proposed in the HEROES Act, and ideally include \$4 billion in immediate funding to the Environmental Protection Agency for grants to the states for a Low-Income Households Drinking Water and Wastewater Assistance/Affordability Program to help struggling households pay for essential water and wastewater service.
3. Emergency funding for affected water utilities, particularly serving disadvantaged or hard-hit communities, to help offset lost revenue, the costs associated with moratoriums on shutoffs, and the essential public health protections being put in place by water utilities.
4. Shutoff moratorium/safe reconnection provision that ensures every American has access to water in their homes now and through the duration of the COVID-19 crisis and that allows for relief to vulnerable customers for a time afterwards to regain their financial footing while also providing needed fiscal support to water systems.

While not a comprehensive list of the actions our various organizations believe should be taken, these do represent meaningful, and we believe necessary, steps to meet both immediate and long-term drinking water needs of Californians while also boosting the economy and helping preserve access to the most fundamental tool in our arsenal to address the spread of COVID-19 -- washing your hands.

We urge the California delegation to champion this issue in the coming weeks. We also encourage you to join your colleagues from the House Environmental Justice Taskforce and the Senate Environmental Justice Caucus as they push for Stimulus provisions to support what Californians and the nation need to ensure both immediate and long-term responses to this crisis and beyond.

We welcome the opportunity to brief you further on this urgent issue. For questions or to discuss further, please do not hesitate to reach out to Adriana Sanchez-Ochoa at NextGen California (adriana.sanchez-ochoa@nextgenamerica.org), Alesandra Najera at Water Foundation (anajera@waterfdn.org), Cindy Tuck at ACWA (cindy@acwa.com), Danielle Blacet-Hyden at CMUA (dblacet@cmua.org), Emily Lam at SFPUC (emlam@sfwater.org), Jennifer Capitolo at the California Water Association (jcapitolo@calwaterassn.com), Jennifer Clary at Clean Water Action (jclary@cleanwater.org), Jonathan Nelson at Community Water Center (jonathan.nelson@communitywatercenter.org), Kalima Rose at PolicyLink (kalima@policylink.org), Phoebe Seaton at Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (pseaton@leadershipcounsel.org), Sean Bothwell at California Coastkeeper Alliance (sbothwell@cacoastkeeper.org), and Tracy Quinn at NRDC (tquinn@nrdc.org).

Sincerely,

Allison Harvey Turner, CEO, Water Foundation

Anja Raudabaugh, CEO, Western United Dairymen

Araceli Palafox, Deputy Director, Lift To Rise

Ari Neumann, Community and Environmental Services Director, Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Arnold Sowell Jr., Executive Director, NextGen California

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

Betsy Reifsnider, Sacramento Policy Associate, Mono Lake Committee

Brandon Dawson, Policy Advocate, Sierra Club California

Bruce Reznik, Executive Director, Los Angeles Waterkeeper

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

Caryn Mandelbaum, Water Program Director, Environment Now

Casey Creamer, President/CEO, California Citrus Mutual

Chanell Fletcher, Executive Director, ClimatePlan

Christopher Sanchez, Policy Advocate, CHIRLA

Cindy Clark, Manager, California Policy, Ceres

Cindy Tuck, P.E., Deputy Executive Director for Government Relations, Association of California Water Agencies

Crisantema Gallardo, 99Rootz Director, Power California

Danielle Blacet-Hyden, Deputy Executive Director, California Municipal Utilities Association

David J. Guy, President, Northern California Water Association

DeAngelo Mack, Director of State Policy, Public Health Advocates

Dennis Nuxoll, Vice President, Federal Government Affairs, Western Growers

Diana Vazquez, California Environmental Justice Alliance

Dolores Huerta, Dolores Huerta Foundation

Don McEnhill, Executive Director, Russian Riverkeeper

Elizabeth Dougherty, Ph.D., Executive Director, Wholly H2O

Elizabeth Martin, Chief Executive Officer, Sierra Fund

Emily Rooney, President, Agricultural Council of California

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

Gary Link, Director of Public Policy, Western Region, Ducks Unlimited

Genoveva Islas, Founder & CEO, Cultiva la Salud

Harlan L. Kelly, Jr., General Manager, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

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

Jennifer Capitolo, Executive Director, California Water Association

Jennifer Clary, Water Programs Manager, Clean Water Action

Jennifer Kalt, Director, Humboldt Baykeeper

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

Jim Wunderman, President and CEO, Bay Area Council

Jonas Minton, Senior Water Policy Advisor, Planning & Conservation League

Jonathan Nelson, Policy Director, Community Water Center

Juan Altamirano, Associate Director of Policy, Audubon

Kalima Rose, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, PolicyLink

Karen L. Bohlke, Director Government and External Relations, Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center

Kassandra Hishida, Coordinator, Community Alliance for Agroecology

Kira Redmond, Executive Director, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper

Luz Gallegos, Program Director, TODEC Legal Center

Margarita Rocha, Executive Director, Centro La Familia Advocacy Services

Mark E. Carlson, Lutherans Restoring Creation, California

Mary Creasman, CEO, California League of Conservation Voters

Mary-Ann Warmerdam, Senior Legislative Advocate, Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)

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

Melinda Booth, Executive Director, South Yuba River Citizens League; Yuba River Waterkeeper

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

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

Olivia Rodriguez, Resident, Thermal California

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

Raul Barraza, General Manager, Arvin Community Services District

Regina Q. Banks, Executive Director, Lutheran Office of Public Policy – California

Ryan G. Sinclair PhD, MPH, Loma Linda University School of Public Health

Samuel Molina, CA State Director, Mi Familia Vota

Sean Bothwell, Executive Director, California Coastkeeper Alliance

Sergio Carranza, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido CDC

Shelley Luce, D. Env., President & CEO, Heal the Bay

Silvia Paz, Executive Director, Alianza

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

Suguet Lopez, Executive Director, Lideres Campesinas

Thomas J. Collishaw, President/CEO, Self-Help Enterprises

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

Valerie Nera, Policy Advocate, California Chamber of Commerce

Vanessa Moreno, Coachella Program Coordinator, Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM)

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

Veronica Tovar, Environmental Justice Program Manager, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton

CC:

Members of the California Congressional Delegation

The Honorable California Governor Gavin Newsom

The Honorable Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins, California State Senate

The Honorable Speaker Anthony Rendon, California State Assembly

The Honorable Secretary Jared Blumenfeld, California Environmental Protection Agency

The Honorable Secretary Wade Crowfoot, California Natural Resources Agency

The Honorable Director Mark Ghilarducci, Governor's Office of Emergency Services

The Honorable Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel, State Water Resources Control Board

The Honorable Board Member Laurel Firestone, State Water Resources Control Board

Deputy Cabinet Secretary Christine Hironaka, Governor's Office

Deputy Legislative Secretary Rachel Wagoner, Governor's Office

Deputy Secretary and Special Counsel for Water Policy Kristin Peer, California Environmental Protection Agency

Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice, Tribal Affairs and Border Relations Yana Garcia, California Environmental Protection Agency

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

Executive Director Eileen Sobek, State Water Resources Control Board