



August 21, 2017

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher
 Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
 State Capitol, Room 2114
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 623 (Monning) -- SUPPORT

Dear Assemblywoman Gonzalez Fletcher:

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, leaving families and communities across the state without safe and affordable drinking water. For example:

- The California State Water Resources Control 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 communities, especially those with small and lower income ratepayer bases.
- Additionally, more and more families and individuals in both urban and rural portions of California are struggling to afford a basic amount of safe water due to unaffordable water rates.
- Finally, State Water Board data does not include the nearly 2 million Californians not served by a public water system, which have few regulatory requirements and are not eligible for most assistance programs, leaving them particularly vulnerable to unsafe drinking water.

The California State Water Resources Control 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 an ongoing funding source to support O&M costs for drinking water treatment.

The new Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund would be authorized to provide both interim drinking water supplies and fund longer-term drinking water solutions, including operation and maintenance costs for low-income communities that need drinking water treatment. The Fund would be administered by the Office of Sustainable Water Solutions at the State Water Board.

As it pertains to fiscal matters germane to this Committee, SB 623 will not require funding from the General Fund but instead will enact new fees that will generate revenue to ensure safe drinking water for all Californians as well as cover agency administrative costs. Funding shall come from an increase in the existing fertilizer mill fee, a new safe drinking water fee on dairies, and a new small safe drinking water fee assessed monthly on water bills. Year 1 of these fees shall be structured to raise a combined total of \$140 million, and then be adjusted annually thereafter to meet the amount identified in an adopted annual funding needs assessment within the fee caps set in statute. For single-family homes and most multi-family homes and businesses, the monthly safe drinking water fee shall be capped at no higher than \$.95 cents, with a low-income rate exemption for households with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level.

In addition to generating new revenue for the state, SB 623 will help reduce state outlays for emergency drinking water spending such as emergency bottled water, which has cost the state \$27.8 million during the last few years alone. SB 623 will also help reduce health morbidities by decreasing incidents of consumption of contaminated drinking water, and will also boost overall public perception of California's drinking water quality. These outcomes may result in long term cost savings for the state's healthcare programs.

In the sixth largest economy in the world, we can and should ensure that all Californians have access to this most basic of human needs – safe and affordable drinking water. For this reason and the other reasons mentioned above, we strongly urge your support of SB 623. 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).

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

Sincerely,

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