



June 3, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of the State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Immediate Water Service Restoration for all Californians

Dear Governor Newsom:

Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times. In particular, thank you for your April 2 Executive Order N-42-20 that placed a statewide moratorium on water shutoffs, as well as your decision in the May Revise to continue SB 200 (Monning, 2019) investments in safe drinking water for low-income communities. Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental and basic human right that should be afforded to all people, especially during a global pandemic.

I write today to urge you to expand Executive Order N-42-20. That Order did not reach Californians who had their water shut off due to non-payment prior to March 4, 2020. Additionally, the existing statutory protections in place today, such as limits on the amount of late fees or reconnection fees that can be charged, do not cover our smallest water systems – and in light of the current crisis, result in inadequate protections even for the larger water systems that are currently covered. Therefore, I respectfully ask action to accomplish the following:

- (1) **Immediately restore water access for all Californian households** with deactivated water accounts due to inability to pay, including those shut off prior to March 4;
- (2) **Waive reconnection fees, late payment fees, other penalties, and collection practices for struggling families;**
- (3) **Require monthly reporting on water shutoffs from water suppliers.** Please also require water suppliers to report the number of shutoffs of occupied residences prior to March 4 that are still without service and the number of reconnections completed since that date.

Executive Order N-42-20 was a good first step in addressing these issues. However, there are gaps that we must fill to ensure that all Californians have access to safe and clean water. It is impossible to ask Californians to safely shelter-in-place or even wash their hands unless we restore access to all households whose water has been shut off.

It is estimated that, in 2019, over 350,000 Californians had their water shut off due to inability to pay. This data, which is based on information collected by the State Water Resources Control Board, indicates water shutoffs particularly affect low-income communities of color – communities that have also been most negatively impacted by the current pandemic. Note, too, that this is a conservative estimate that likely does not accurately reflect the actual number of

Californians affected by water shutoffs. Data collected is self-reported by water agencies and not all water agencies comply. Another study, for example, by the Pacific Institute, found that 196,800 single-family households had their water shut off in 2018, impacting an estimated 583,000 Californians.

While it is difficult to say how many California families lost water service before March 4 and/or are still without safe water to this day, it is fair to estimate that the number could be in the tens of thousands. These families were affected early by the COVID-19 pandemic and did not qualify for your Executive Order's immediate restoration provision. That is why I am also respectfully requesting that you order the immediate water restoration for any occupied households who lost water before or after March 4 and still have yet to be reconnected, and that you conduct oversight, and require reporting and enforcement as necessary. It is equally imperative that we provide assurance that families will not be subject to late fees, penalties and aggressive collection efforts if they are unable to pay water bills during this emergency.

Our State faces major challenges when it comes to water. However, I strongly believe that as elected leaders, we must do everything we can to ensure that our residents at the very least have access to clean water, especially so long as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. I respectfully urge your immediate action on this issue. Thank you.

Sincerely,



ROBERT RIVAS
Assemblymember, 30th District



BILL DODD
Senator, 3rd District



EDUARDO GARCIA
Assemblymember, 56th District



KANSEN CHU
Assemblymember, 25th District

CC: Secretary Jared Blumenfeld, California Environmental Protection Agency
Secretary Wade Crowfoot, California Natural Resources Agency
Eileen Sobek, Exec. Dir., California State Water Resources Control Board
E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, California State Water Resources Control Board
Honorable Members, California State Water Resources Control Board
President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, California Senate
Speaker Anthony Rendon, California Assembly

Deputy Cabinet Secretary Christine Hironaka, Governor's Office
Deputy Legislative Secretary Rachel Wagoner, Governor's Office