

# AB 685 (ENG) –THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER

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**Co-Sponsors:** Community Water Center, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water, Food and Water Watch, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry Action Network - CA, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Urban Semillas

## **IN BRIEF**

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More than 250,000 California residents, in the Central Valley alone, lack safe water for drinking, bathing, and washing dishes. Even more have water service disconnected because they cannot afford to pay their water bill. This legislation will establish the right of every human to have access to clean water for basic human needs as a State policy and instruct State agencies to conform their practices and programs to this policy.

## **THE ISSUE**

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More than 11.5 million Californians rely on water suppliers that faced at least one violation of State Drinking Water Standards. As many as 8.5 million of us rely on supplies that experienced more than five exceedences in a single year. In far too many communities, whose sole water supply is contaminated, families unable to afford treatment are often left entirely without safe water. The Central Valley and Central Coast regions, where more than 90% of the communities rely solely on groundwater, are at particular risk.

In addition to public health threats, Californians are faced with rising water bills to treat contamination and upgrade old infrastructure, which if neglected could even offset the benefits of treatment. California does not have a universal statewide lifeline water rate or allocation – similar to our lifeline rates for energy and phone service – so when costs become excessive, families cannot pay their bills and, thereby, they risk losing water service entirely.

## **EXISTING LAW**

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Existing Public Utilities Code Section 739.8 establishes “access to an adequate supply of healthful water [as] a basic necessity of human life, and shall be made available to all residents of California at an affordable cost.” This statute applies to all water providers regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission.

Dozens of state agencies have some regulatory authority over potable water availability and quality including the Department of Public Health, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the Department of Water Resources.

## **FIRST STEP SOLUTION**

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AB 1242 creates a policy of the State that includes all State agencies, in addition to those agencies regulated by the PUC, that share responsibility for the quality and supply of potable water. By doing so we ensure that all agencies appreciate their role in ensuring that every person has access to clean, affordable water.

Adding a provision to the Water Code explicitly stating that access to an amount of clean water necessary for basic human needs is a “right” of every Californian and instructing State agencies, dealing with water resources, to conform their programs and practices to this policy will pave the way to ensure that every Californian will someday be able to confidently fill a glass of water from their tap and serve it to their families.

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For more information contact:

Debbie Davis  
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water  
(916)743-4406  
[debbie@ejcw.org](mailto:debbie@ejcw.org)