



September 13, 2011

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown Jr
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Human Right to Water Bill Package: AB 938, AB 983, AB 1221, SB 244

Dear Governor Brown:

We request your signature on the “Human Right to Water” bill package, which consists of the following bills:

AB 938 (V.M. Perez) Warning Notices

AB 983 (Perea) Access to Safe Drinking Water Funds

AB 1221 (Alejo) Access to Water Pollution Cleanup Funds

SB 244 (Wolk) Water Infrastructure Planning for Unincorporated Communities

Each of these bill makes an important contribution toward our collective vision, one you outlined in your “Water Plan for the 21st Century,” ushering in the day when everyone in California has access to safe, affordable water. Moreover, these bills received strong bipartisan support in the Legislature.

The bills each make discrete changes that ensure the communities that are most in need of assistance in connecting to safe water sources will gain improved access to existing programs. Specifically, **AB 983 (Perea)** will make CDPH's Drinking Water Program more accessible by providing faster reimbursement for severely disadvantaged communities, and will increase the current 80% limit on grants to 100% for these communities. **AB 1221 (Alejo)** will make disadvantaged communities and tribes eligible for the State Water Resources Control Board's Clean-up and Abatement Account. **SB 244 (Wolk)** will make unincorporated communities part of local planning. **AB 938 (VM Perez)** will ensure that community members are given the basic respect of receiving important safety information about their water in a language they actually understand. The changes made in these bills will provide immediate relief to impacted communities.

There is international recognition that access to clean, safe and affordable water is a fundamental human right essential to our health, the environment and the economy. Unfortunately, as you know, California, one of the largest economies in the world, had detectable nitrates above regulatory standards in the drinking water supplies of more than 11.2 million Californians from 1997 through 2001, while the drinking water of 8.5 million Californians was subject to five or more violations of the standard. Groundwater pollution means that Californians, many of whom are in some of our poorest communities, face the dilemma of paying twice for their water, once for water service and again for expensive onsite treatment or bottled water. If residents are unable to pay this double cost, they end up without safe drinking water. The failure of the State to ensure clean and safe water for all is becoming a question of morality as we see corporate businesses and agriculture gaining favored access to this precious state resource while the vast majority of impacted communities struggle to meet their basic needs.

These bills spring from collaborations developed over the past 10 years that have identified needed changes to our water infrastructure to attain our shared goals. This package is informed by reported conditions in communities up and down the State. With your approval of this bill package, California will take an important step forward towards a day when everyone in California will have safe clean water. Without clean water communities face chronic poverty, increased healthcare costs, lost access to education funding due to missed days of school, and lost wages and job security through missed work - all of which creates a burden on the community and on the State.

Unfortunately, the cornerstone of the package, AB 685 (Eng), the Human Right to Water bill, has stalled in the Senate Appropriations Committee.


While each of the four bills presented to you for your signature makes important contributions to ensuring clean water for the people of California, it is AB 685 (Eng) that commits California to a policy that every human being has a right to clean, affordable and accessible water. This bill would direct state agencies to include appropriate measures into relevant regulations and funding criteria consistent with a “Human Right to Water” policy – were it not for being held on the Senate Appropriations suspense file. AB 685 would allow your Administration to take the lead working with affected communities to identify policy and programmatic changes necessary for human health and wellbeing.

The fact that California has not solved the safe drinking water crisis after spending more than \$13 billion of general obligation bond revenues (bonds titled “Safe Drinking Water”) should be ample evidence that the State needs to focus more clearly its priorities. AB 685 will provide the foundation for state agencies, under your leadership, to move assertively forward in ensuring clean water for all Californians. We invite your support to ensure AB 685 is sent to you in January 2012.

It is unacceptable that any family in California must spend extra to either purchase bottled water or allow their families to use contaminated water as the last resort. Even if they can afford to purchase bottled drinking water, families must still cook, wash dishes, and bathe their children in contaminated water. Children, with their quicker metabolism, more readily absorb contaminated water through their pores as well as through consumption, and thus are far more susceptible to disease caused by drinking water contamination. No person should have to make the heart-wrenching choices forced upon families that cannot afford such an essential resource. To think that some California residents have been facing this situation for a decade or more is unthinkable and must change.

The bill package before you would begin to turn the tide and would lay an important foundation for the work that remains to be done creating the roadmap for more systematic change. We urge you to sign the important bills that are now awaiting your signature. Thank you for considering our views, please contact us if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



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California Rural Legal Assistance
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