

Support Implementation of the Human Right to Water

Budget Trailer 825

Hundreds of thousands of Californians lack access to safe and affordable drinking water, a lack exacerbated by the current drought. Thousands of homes have already lost access to running water, and dropping ground water levels threaten to leave more wells dry. Many small water systems serving disadvantaged, often unincorporated communities lack the capacity to reliably deliver water, or adequately treat the water they supply, exposing families to arsenic, nitrates and other contaminants. Paradoxically, many of these vulnerable communities are within blocks of larger, sustainable drinking water systems, but a variety of political, social, economic and racial factors have frustrated efforts to connect communities. The result: an intractable stalemate that threatens the health of families living in hundreds of disadvantaged communities. Two examples will provide dramatic proof of the need for the legislature to take action:

Hundreds of wells serving private homes have failed in East Porterville, a large unincorporated community adjacent to the City of Porterville. Wells in East Porterville are shallow, reliant on recharge from the Tule River, and widely contaminated with high levels of nitrate. Due to the drought, many families have lived without water, or relied on front-yard storage tanks, for well over a year now. The permanent solution, a community water system, would likely rely on the City of Porterville as a consolidating entity. The City is hesitant to make commitments due to uncertainty about available water supply, compounded by the absence of a mandate or remuneration for extending service.

And yet, the City's commitment is a key piece to initiate forward momentum.

The California State Legislature was the first in the nation to establish a Human Right to Water. Further action is needed to ensure that right.

Solution

The Brown Administration has proposed Budget Trailer Bill 825 (TBL 825) to provide needed tools to achieve sustainable drinking water solutions for disadvantaged communities in the state. By focusing this proposal on disadvantaged unincorporated communities and disadvantaged communities served by mutual water companies, TBL 825 targets the most vulnerable communities of all. System consolidation and service extension is for many of these communities the only sustainable solution to their domestic water needs. The state would provide the resources and legal protections needed to facilitate permanent solutions, removing the major reasons that larger communities give for opposing consolidation. TBL 825 would give the state the authority to require consolidation where needed and where financing could be provided to facilitate the action.

Without this authority, safe drinking water could remain within eyesight but beyond the reach of these and hundreds of other communities.

WE URGE YOUR SUPPORT FOR THIS BADLY NEEDED SOLUTION TO DELIVERING RELIABLE, SAFE AND AFFORDABLE DRINKING WATER TO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES.

