



**PolicyLink**



## 2018-2019 California Budget Priorities Emergency Drinking Water and Wastewater Package

California communities and schools continue to face severe challenges to access safe drinking water. More than a million Californians pay for water services that fail to meet safe drinking water standards. The recent drought's continued impact means thousands still face dry wells, and uncertain rainfall patterns mean drought is a constant threat. The \$23.5 million funding package below would provide emergency assistance for low-income communities, families, and schools.

- ◆ **Emergency relief – wells and septic systems:** Increase funding for emergency relief (drought and public health threats) including, but not limited to, well replacement, septic system replacement, permanent connections to public systems, well abandonment, septic system abandonment, Point of Use and Point of Entry systems and debt relief. Thousands of Californians, primarily in small, rural and disadvantaged communities, already live in crisis and experience complete water loss and acute impacts due to increasing water scarcity and chronic groundwater contamination. Failing septic systems are one of the most serious threats to our groundwater supply and pose a significant ongoing public health threat. This funding should also assist low-income homeowners to repair and replace failing septic systems that threaten public health. Millions of Californians, primarily those in rural communities, depend on septic systems to manage household wastewater. The same residents that rely on private wells for their drinking water often rely on septic systems, increasing the public health threat of failing septic systems. It is critical that this funding source be available for necessary improvements on private property for lower income households and disadvantaged communities, including emergency improvements in mobile home parks housing lower income tenants. \$10 million.
- ◆ **Emergency relief – water tanks:** Nearly 300 households with dry wells still rely on water tanks that are filled by trucks to serve their basic household water needs and additional households have experienced total well failures in the past year, thus too late to access the water tank program. In the meantime, they work toward new wells or a community

water system to provide an adequate water supply. As one household gets a new well, a nearby household's well may go dry. There is no clear "end" to the drought's effects on the state's groundwater supplies. The state has allocated funds to replace dry wells, but there remains a significant unmet need for well replacement. In the meantime, those households need immediate, ongoing access to water. Funding is needed to install tank systems for homes that have had wells recently go dry and continue to supply water tanks with water as an emergency measure while households await new wells or upgrades to community water systems. \$3.5 million.

- ◆ **State Water Board's Drinking Water for Schools Program:** Building on the program established in the 2016 state budget this program will provide additional funding to expand the State Water Board's Safe Drinking Water for Schools grant program. This program helps to supply access to safe drinking water for students in schools that currently lack a source of clean drinking water. Current funding levels for the program will fund about 500 of the state's 10,000 schools. In October 2017, after passage of the original funding, the Governor signed legislation mandating that public schools test their drinking water for lead contamination. This is expected to demonstrate a significant demand for the program. To compound the issue, the new 1,2,3-TCP maximum contaminant level (MCL) standard also takes effect in 2018. We expect hundreds, if not thousands, of schools will be out of compliance with the 1,2,3-TCP MCL and will need additional resources to ensure student safety. While long-term solutions are debated, funded and brought online, the State Water Board's Drinking Water for Schools program is a cost effective and low-impact way to provide immediate safe drinking water access to students in low-income, rural communities, including addressing contamination issues like lead, 1,2,3-TCP and arsenic. Numerous initial evaluation results prove the many merits of this program. \$10 million.