SB623: A Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund for California

Laurel Firestone
More than 300 communities and schools lack access to safe drinking water in CA.
Arsenic and nitrate drinking water contamination disproportionately impacts low-income and Latino communities. Balazs et al. 2011
Some residents spend up to 10% of their household income on drinking water.
UNSAFE WATER IN SCHOOLS

- **979 - 1,688 schools** may have been impacted by unsafe drinking water between 2003 and 2014.
- As many as **1 in 4 schools** in the Central Valley have been impacted by unsafe water.
This graphic displays locations of reported dry water supply wells, as collected and located by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research as of 04-27-15.

Many of the locations are close to one another and difficult to clearly display on a statewide scale because the points overlap. This graphic depicts nearly 1,900 points.
Almost 12,000 Californians have run out of water during the drought.
2015-16 CA spent $148 million in emergency drinking water funding in Tulare County alone.
2012 Human Right to Water Act

• “Every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.”
Securing the Human Right to Water

Resilient Drinking Water Institutions

Community Power and Engaged Leadership

Funding Access

Source Water Protection & Management

Reliable Access to Safe, Clean & Affordable Drinking Water
New Policy Tools

- Human Right to Water
- Proposition 1 Water Bond
- Office of Sustainable Water Solutions
- New Consolidation Powers
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act
- Dairies & Irrigated Lands Regulatory Programs
- School testing and funding programs
Remaining Funding Barriers

- Communities not being able to afford to provide safe drinking water
  - O&M,
  - capital, planning, technical assistance
  - emergency replacement water

- Families/households not being able to afford a basic provision of drinking water
  - AB401 – low income ratepayer assistance
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE
CASE STUDY: LANARE
Solutions moving forward

- **SB623: Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund**
  - Leverage sources of capital $ 
  - Build on Technical Assistance at SWRCB 
  - Cover funding gaps (esp. O&M)

- **Implement Complementary Programs / Powers**
  - Promote more resilient institutions 
  - Protect source water 
  - Improve information access (private wells, lead in schools, etc.) 
  - Address Ratepayer Affordability - LIRA Program(s)
SB623: Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund

Broad Eligibility in order to:
- Fill gaps for those that need it most
- Secure long-term sustainability and cost effectiveness of drinking water services and infrastructure

Prioritizes:
- Disadvantaged communities and low-income domestic well users that
  - Consistently fail to provide an adequate supply of safe drinking water
  - Must charge rates that are above an adopted affordability threshold in order to provide safe water
- Non-capital costs that can’t be covered by other sources of $

Transparency:
- Annual needs assessment
- Fund implementation plan developed and adopted in consultation with a broad multidisciplinary stakeholder group
- Regular public review and assessment of the Fund
SB623: Sustained funding shall come from:

- **Increase to the existing fertilizer mill fees and fees on dairy producers**
  - CDFA also to establish a new fee for other non-dairy CAFOs
  - Estimated to raise $30M annually for 15 years and $10M annually after that

- **New safe drinking water fee assessed monthly on drinking water bills**
  - The monthly safe drinking water fee is capped at a maximum of $.95 cents for most water users
  - Exemption from the fee for low-income households (under 200% of the federal poverty level)

Combined fees will raise an estimated total of $140 million annually for the first two years, and thereafter can be kept consistent or reduced by the State Water Board based on the annual need assessment.

Fees CANNOT be adjusted to exceed the caps identified in statute.
SB 623: Developing better data and assistance

- Collect and analyze existing local data on private wells and state small systems
- Identify high risk areas
- Support outreach and private well testing for low-income households and state small systems
Widespread Support

- More than 100 diverse organizations support SB 623, including agriculture, EJ, environmental groups, public health, cities, water districts, counties, labor, etc.
- Polling shows Californians want government action to address this issue and 72% of Californians would support a small monthly fee of $1 or more to help solve California’s drinking water problems, even if it is outside of their own system or region.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!
Community Water Center: Because clean water is a right, not a privilege.

Join the movement and find out more online!

CommunityWaterCenter.org

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