Media Release

State Water Board expedites funding process for high-priority drinking water projects

New protocols fast track ready projects in disadvantaged communities

March 20, 2023 **Contact:** Dimitri Stanich – Information Officer

SACRAMENTO – As part of its ongoing effort to accelerate access to safe and affordable drinking water for Californians who need it, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted new guidelines that will expedite the approval of funding for eligible projects that address failing infrastructure in disadvantaged communities.

The guidelines address applications to the funding arm of the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program. SAFER, established in 2019, is a set of tools, funding sources and regulatory authorities created to secure safe—and economically and environmentally sustainable—drinking water access for California's disadvantaged communities. The state enacted drinking water as a human right in 2012.

"The board's SAFER program is accelerating funding solutions to the state's drinking water problems by fast-tracking projects that are well-developed, benefit disadvantaged communities and are close to being shovel-ready," said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. "This is about facilitating financial support for drinking water infrastructure projects so they can be completed as quickly as possible, while still carrying out the due diligence and compliance review necessary for state and federal investments."

To be eligible for consideration under the new Expedited Drinking Water Grant Program guidelines, projects must:

- Be carried out by community water systems owned by public agencies, public school districts or public utilities incorporated in California;
- Be eligible to receive grant funds according to eligibilities defined in the DWSRF Intended Use Plan, with a focus on small disadvantaged communities;
- Address high-priority public health or water supply and reliability issues, or enable consolidation; and
- Meet the criteria and requirements of respective funding streams administered by the State Water Board's Department of Financial Assistance.

For projects that meet these eligibility criteria, the new guidelines allow staff to then identify other triggers for priority processing, such as: advanced capacity of the applicant administrator, project plan maturity, a completion schedule that is established and reasonable, and whether the project's California Environmental Quality Act Impact Report is completed or it is qualified for exemption.

"These guidelines now allow us to apply staff's extensive project and procedural experience to avoid redundant reviews and administer applications more efficiently," said Division of Financial Assistance Deputy Director Joe Karkoski.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment and public health, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.

The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment-particularly in disadvantaged communities.