Fact Sheet

SB 200 Closes Funding Gap to Provide All Californians with Access to Safe and Affordable Drinking Water

SACRAMENTO – Since taking office, Governor Gavin Newsom has made ensuring that every Californian has access to safe and affordable drinking water one of his top priorities. On July 24, he signed Senate Bill (SB) 200 establishing a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund to close the funding gap and address a crisis that affects more than one million people in communities across the state.

The fund will provide $130 million annually to enable the State Water Board to provide critical, ongoing operations and maintenance support for small community water systems that are unable to meet safe drinking water standards. Until now, no such funding source existed.

The Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund is the keystone to a comprehensive program that the Board has built to help struggling water systems sustainably and affordably provide safe drinking water to their customers. This program includes building local technical and managerial capacity, promoting consolidation and regionalization to achieve economies of scale, and providing access to capital investments to upgrade water systems.

The State Water Board is developing a strategic plan to implement the fund and secure safe drinking water for all California communities as quickly and efficiently as possible. A draft implementation plan will be released for public comment and discussion at the Board's Aug. 20 meeting. A robust public process and input from an ongoing stakeholder advisory group will inform the State Water Board's use of the fund.

Closing the Safe Drinking Water Gap

Since the Legislature transferred the Drinking Water Program to the State Water Board in 2014, the board, working with the Legislature and stakeholders, has made significant progress toward ensuring that all Californians have access to safe drinking water and achieving the goals of the Human Right to Water Act (AB 685, 2012).

Since 2014, the Board has:

- Brought 275 systems that were failing to deliver safe drinking water back into compliance.
- Taken actions that led to the consolidation of over 100 failing - or likely to fail - water systems.

- Helped more than 200 small disadvantaged communities secure funding for project planning and construction through our Office of Sustainable Water Solutions.

Despite these efforts, more than one million Californians in over 300 communities still lack access to safe and affordable drinking water. Most of these communities are served by small water systems that are unable to provide water that meets public health standards for contaminants such as arsenic, nitrates, and uranium. The primary challenge has been the lack of a funding source for the sustainable, long-term operation and maintenance of drinking water systems.

The Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund enables the State Water Board to aggressively address the crisis. Closing this funding gap will allow the State Water Board to address the full array of issues that have in the past been barriers to solving water supply, infrastructure and operational issues. This fund will provide crucial support for operations and maintenance so once-struggling systems can provide a sustainable source of safe drinking water.

Background on Safe Drinking Water Challenges

- **One million Californians lack access to water that is reliably safe for drinking** because these smaller poorly maintained older water systems and private wells located in disadvantaged communities around the state contain contaminants such as arsenic, nitrates and 1,2,3-TCP. Prolonged exposure to any of these contaminants increases health risks to children and adults.

  Treatment technologies exist to remove these contaminants from drinking water. Treatment systems must be properly operated and maintained, however, and existing sources of state and federal funding do not allow local use for operations and maintenance.

- **A consistent source of funding was needed** to provide the necessary resources to more than 300 rural and small water systems that cannot currently provide safe drinking water to their communities. Hundreds more small systems serving millions of people are at risk of failure due to lack of capacity to treat emerging contaminants, poor financial health, and aging infrastructure.

  In contrast, more than 400 of the state's largest water systems (those with 3,000 or more customers) that serve more than 90 percent of the state's 39.5 million residents, have been able to deliver safe drinking water to their customers for decades.

- **California's has many more small water systems as compared to other utilities.** There are more than 7,400 public water systems in California, with approximately 2,900 being community water systems and over 4,000 individual water systems that serve schools and businesses. In contrast, there are 75 energy utilities and 900 centralized wastewater treatment systems. Consolidation of these small systems with larger systems or several small systems to make one larger system will increase efficiency

and delivery of safe drinking water to many small communities, including urban neighborhoods not served by larger municipal systems.

- While **data are limited on domestic well water safety due to the fact that individual domestic wells are not regulated** and don't require the kind of testing that public water wells do, the problem of drinking water contamination appears statewide and can be severe in some areas. According to the US Geological Survey, more than 1.5 million Californians use domestic well water that remains largely untested.

  The State Water Board's ground water ambient monitoring and assessment program (GAMA)'s has data from voluntary testing of 1,146 domestic wells in six counties between 2002-2011, and integrates other private well data sets as available, such as the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's well testing program. In Tulare County and the Salinas Valley, for example, more than a third of wells tested had nitrate over the maximum contaminant levels or MCLs (the maximum allowed in drinking water that humans can be exposed to over a lifetime of daily exposure)

The State Water Board maintains a list and map of communities not meeting current drinking water quality standards on its Human Right to Water portal. Since 2010, the state has distributed over $3 billion in bonds and federal funds for the repair, replacement, and improvement of aging infrastructure and installation of new treatment systems for over 600 projects to comply with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

For more information please visit the State Water Board's Division of Drinking Programs home page. For more information, or to track progress on this effort, please visit the State Water Boards' Human Right Water website.

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