



August 11, 2020

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 414 (Caballero) Small System Water Authority Act of 2020 - **SUPPORT AS PROPOSED TO BE AMENDED**

Dear Chair Gonzalez:

The organizations listed below, representing water agencies, environmental justice organizations, and environmental organizations throughout the state, strongly support SB 414 (Caballero), the Small System Water Authority Act of 2020, as proposed to be amended.

There are California communities throughout the state that do not have access to safe and reliable water supplies. In fact, as of March 2020 the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) has identified over 300 water systems serving over 900,000 Californians that consistently fail to provide safe drinking water to the residents they serve. Many more are at high risk of failure, often due to a lack of technical, managerial and financial (TMF) capacity. It is unacceptable for any Californians to live without safe drinking water. It is therefore imperative that we advance additional tools that can help facilitate consolidation and regional solutions.

California has made significant progress towards addressing the drinking water crisis in recent years. AB 685 (2012) recognized access to drinking water as a human right, and SB 88 (2015) granted the State Water Board authority to mandate water system consolidation benefiting communities struggling with drinking water contamination. AB 508 (2019) refined the State Water Board's consolidation authority. SB 200 (2019) provided a continuous appropriation of \$130 million per year to fund drinking water solutions.

To continue this progress, the Small System Water Authority Act of 2020 would establish a new and innovative tool for water systems that are currently unable to serve safe drinking water in their communities or are at risk of being unable to do so in the future, and whose issues cannot be addressed through existing consolidation authorities. SB 414 seeks to implement an approach based on the fundamental principles of fairness, transparency and accountability by establishing a process for forming a Small System Water Authority comprised of non-compliant or at-risk systems at the county or sub-county level. Other water systems and County Service Agencies that provide water service also are given the opportunity to voluntarily join an Authority as it is being formed including if a number of customers of a system submit a petition to the formation coordinator. This new structure will offer to the affected communities a sustainable solution through increased economies of scale and will maximize their TMF capacity, all leading to the delivery of safe and reliable water. Notably these water systems also will empower local communities through enhanced transparency and local governance.

Additionally, SB 414 would resolve a gap in the State Water Board's existing authority to encourage and mandate consolidation of water systems. The Board's current authority is limited to reactive solutions after a water system has consistently failed to provide safe drinking water. To address drinking water problems proactively before they turn into crises, and to prevent both risk to public health and inefficient emergency use of public resources, SB 414 would grant the State Water Board the authority to proactively encourage and mandate consolidation of water systems that are at risk of failure.

The current pandemic is only one more stark reminder of the importance of providing every Californian access to safe, clean and affordable drinking water. The time is now to address these challenges facing our state. Every California resident should have access to safe and reliable drinking water on a daily basis. SB 414 provides a sustainable path forward to help achieve this goal.

For the above reasons we urge your support for SB 414 when it is heard before the Appropriations Committee. If you have any questions regarding our position, please contact Danielle Blacet-Hyden with California Municipal Utilities Association at 916-847-8444 or Michael Claiborne with Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability at (559) 753-4353.

Sincerely,



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Association



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Cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Jennifer Galehouse, Deputy Chief Consultant, Assembly Appropriations Committee
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