

**SPUR****Union of Concerned Scientists****PolicyLink**

September 2, 2022

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Email: leg.unit@gov.ca.gov

**Re: SB 222 (Dodd) Framework for Statewide Water Affordability Assistance Program –  
REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE**

Dear Governor Newsom:

As the sponsors and other organizations that work directly with or in partnership with disadvantaged and low-income communities of color, we write to request your signature on SB 222 (Dodd). SB 222 would establish a first in the nation Low-Income Water Rate Assistance Program to ensure that all Californians can access drinking water and wastewater services regardless of income. We have worked closely for over a year with your administration, water agencies and other organizations to identify and address issues and concerns. The final version of the bill will create a robust affordability program that the State Water Resources Control Board (SWB) will be able to implement efficiently.

California has recognized for ten years that everyone has a right to affordable drinking water and wastewater. Yet, water and sewer rates consistently outpace inflation, as demonstrated by families paying 45% more per month for drinking water service in 2015 than in 2007. In 2015, California passed AB 401 (Dodd), requiring the SWB to prepare a report to guide the future development of a low-income water rate assistance program. SB 222 incorporates many of the SWB's recommendations contained in the resulting AB 401 Report.

SB 222 is needed because water and sewer affordability is a statewide issue that cannot be addressed by most water and sewer systems without state assistance. Small water systems in disadvantaged communities are unable to set up their own affordability programs due to lack of rate base, and Proposition 218 limits the use of ratepayer funds for all publicly owned water and wastewater systems. SB 222 addresses

these barriers by providing a framework for state funding for low-income water rate assistance, creating a public process for the SWB to create guidelines for program implementation, and directing the use of third-party administrators where feasible and cost effective to ensure efficient delivery of aid to Californians.

As you recognized in [California's Water Supply Strategy - Adapting to a Hotter, Drier Future](#), “**Water affordability is key to ensuring the human right to water**” and, like similar programs for electricity and communications utilities, “**it is important to address [affordability] in the water utility sector in a way that is workable and sustainable from a state budget perspective.**” SB 222 moves California towards your commitment to address low-income household water affordability. It is important to note that SB 222 is contingent upon the appropriation of funding and will not become operative until a funding source is identified. We request your signature on SB 222 and look forward to working with your office and the Legislature in 2023 to secure a stable funding source.

For questions or more information, please contact Jennifer Clary at [jclary@cleanwater.org](mailto:jclary@cleanwater.org), Michael Claiborne at [mclaiborne@leadershipcounsel.org](mailto:mclaiborne@leadershipcounsel.org), and Kyle Jones at [Kyle.jones@communitywatercenter.org](mailto:Kyle.jones@communitywatercenter.org).

Sincerely,

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*Rabbi Jocee Hudson, Clergy &  
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**LA Voice**

CC:

The Honorable Bill Dodd, California State Senate District 3

Angela Pontes, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Governor Newsom