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California Kills the Right to Clean Water Act, Leaving State's Waters Exposed to Federal Rollbacks

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Today, the Assembly Appropriations Committee failed to move SB 601, the Right to Clean Water Act, to the Assembly floor for a final vote. The bill, authored by Senator Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), now has no possibility of being adopted this legislative session. SB 601's death leaves millions of Californians and thousands of miles of streams and wetlands without the safeguards they enjoyed for the last half-century under the federal Clean Water Act.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision in *Sackett v. EPA* stripped federal Clean Water Act protections from the majority of California's wetlands and seasonal streams — the very waters that recharge our aquifers, filter our drinking water, and buffer our communities from flooding. SB 601 would have ensured that the same polluting discharges regulated under the Clean Water Act before the *Sackett* decision remain subject to equivalent protections under state law.

"Today, our state leaders failed to meet the moment. At a time when states across the country are stepping up to protect their waters from the impacts of the Trump Administration's rollbacks, California chose to stand down. Hopefully California's next Governor will stand up for clean water protections over corporate interests — but today, the legislature and Governor Newsom chose instead to leave Californians vulnerable to increased water pollution," said **Sean Bothwell, Executive Director of the California Coastkeeper Alliance**, a co-sponsor of the bill.

SB 601 was crafted to do three things: require new state permits for formerly federally protected waters be as protective as the Clean Water Act permits they would replace; keep existing water quality restoration plans ([TMDLs](#)) in effect; and prevent polluters from escaping their cleanup obligations in California in light of looser federal regulations established under Trump.

While California's leaders have failed to enact the clean water protections lost since the *Sackett* decision, several other states have moved to close the *Sackett* gap and shore up their own clean water laws against federal retrenchment. California — long the nation's environmental leader — now finds itself behind.

The California Coastkeeper Alliance thanks Senator Allen for his steadfast leadership and the coalition of Waterkeepers, environmental justice organizations, and community groups who worked hard to pass this bill. The fight to restore essential protections for California's waters will resume in the next legislative session, when a new Governor will be in place.

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ABOUT CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE - California Coastkeeper Alliance represents Waterkeepers programs statewide as they fight for drinkable, swimmable, fishable waters for all Californians. CCKA defends and expands California's protective legislation and strengthens the function of our State Water Board. For more information, visit www.cacoastkeeper.org or @CA_Waterkeepers on social media.