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**Governor Newsom Ignores Water-Sector Consensus and Fails to Make
Water Affordable in California**

After a decade of stakeholder process and legislative hearings, SB 1125 enjoyed universal support from affordability advocates and the water utility sector. The bill would have established the nation's first statewide water affordability program to ensure that all Californians—especially low-income households—have access to safe and affordable drinking water. We urge the next Governor and Legislature to quickly pass and fund this commonsense affordability measure in 2027.

SACRAMENTO, CA — Yesterday, California Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Senate Bill 1125 (SB 1125), groundbreaking legislation that would have established a statewide Low-Income Water Rate Assistance Program, the first of its kind in the nation. The bill, authored by Senator Caroline Menjivar, would have addressed water affordability and ensured that all families have access to safe and affordable water.

“At a time when gas, food, and utilities are rising across the country, no one should have to go into debt simply for wanting access to clean water. I was proud to author SB 1125. We had the opportunity to set a precedent for a first in the nation Statewide Water Affordability Program but weren't able to fulfill the promise to keep California leading on affordability. This bill advanced generations of frontline communities and advocates who have called for water to become a human right, and its veto is contrary to their lived experiences.” **said Senator Caroline Menjivar (D–San Fernando Valley).**

California's affordability crisis is disproportionately impacting low-income families. While assistance programs have long been available for utilities like electricity, gas, and broadband, there has not been a universal low-income rate assistance program for families struggling to pay their water bills. Water debt is a statewide emergency. In 2021, the State Water Board found that [28% of CA households](#) had overdue water bills. An industry study released in February 2025 found that [rates had increased over 24% in the past 5 years](#).

“Governor Gavin Newsom had the opportunity to showcase California's leadership in creating solutions to the affordability and drinking water crisis, and it is unfortunate for the families in need that he did not rise to the occasion.” said **Taylor Valmores, Sr. Legislative Manager of Community Water Center**.

As water rates [continue to rise](#), families will continue struggling to pay their water bills as more and more households fall behind. Meanwhile, the framework established in SB 1125 would have delivered financial relief directly, via monthly utility bills, allowing low-income ratepayers to avoid falling behind on bills preventing water shutoffs.

“SB 1125 was negotiated in good faith with advocates, state agencies, legislators — and the governor’s office,” said **Jennifer Clary, California Director of Clean Water Action**. “The bill had no opposition and broad support — and it fulfilled the governor’s promise in his 2022 Water Strategy document to address affordability. And it didn’t require immediate funding. We’re unhappy, but we’re not planning to give up our efforts based on this veto.”

“Impacted community residents have traveled to Sacramento dozens of times over the last five years to tell the Governor and Legislature first hand what it is like to struggle to afford drinking water,” said **Michael Claiborne, Directing Attorney with Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability**. “The Governor’s veto is deeply disappointing, but it will not halt the momentum generated this year toward a consensus policy that can help make water more affordable for all Californians.”

Advocates pointed out that this action is in keeping with the Governor’s recent actions to gut the SAFER program, which he originally championed when he first took office in 2019. The SAFER program has reduced the number of Californians without safe drinking water by over 1 million people since 2019, yet the Governor’s budget proposals would have allowed funding to be cut by 80% this year, until the legislature stepped up to increase funding.

Frontline communities, community partners, and allies, led by strong leadership from Senator Caroline Menjivar were looking towards this solution to the affordability crisis in California. No household should have to sacrifice food, rent, or other basic necessities to afford water. Families struggling to pay their water utility bills should have access to urgently needed universal, statewide access to water rate assistance. Thanks to this Governor, they will not receive relief this year. But, the fight for affordable water is not over.

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Community Water Center (CWC) works to ensure that all communities have reliable access to safe, clean, and affordable water. Founded in 2006, CWC is a not-for-profit environmental justice organization, whose mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through education, organizing, and advocacy.

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Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability works alongside the most impacted communities in the San Joaquin Valley and Eastern Coachella Valley to advocate for sound policy and eradicate injustice to secure equal access to opportunity regardless of wealth, race,

income, and place. Leadership Counsel focuses on issues like housing, land use, transportation, safe and affordable drinking water and climate change impacts on communities. Twitter: LCJandA FB: @lcjcalifornia IG: @leadership_counsel Web: leadershipcounsel.org

Clean Water Action - Since our founding during the campaign to pass the landmark Clean Water Act in 1972, Clean Water Action has worked to win strong health and environmental protections by bringing issue expertise, solution-oriented thinking and people power to the table.