

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

The Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) held a Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) public meeting on November 29, 2022, to receive comments on the revised program guidelines from interested parties and members of the public.

The following public comments and corresponding CSD responses have been organized in the order they were received. To access the complete written comments, please click on the organization or member of the public listed below.

The following organizations and members of the public submitted written comments:

[California Municipal Utilities Association](#)

[Central Coast Energy Services](#)

[Debbie Baize – Individual](#)

[Joint Letter](#)

- Clean Water Action
- Community Water Center – El Centro Comunitario Por El Agua
- Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

To listen to the public meeting and comments and questions received, please click [here](#).

To read the public meeting and comments and questions received, please click [here](#).

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
Repeated LIHWAP Assistance	<p>Debbie Baize (Individual)</p> <p>Could a provision please be added to the LIHWAP guidelines to allow those that have already received a LIWHAP grant to receive the full LIHWAP grant based on their income level?</p>	<p>LIHWAP is a one-time, federally funded relief program that provides financial assistance to low-income households who have struggled to make water and/or wastewater payments. Due to the limited funding nature of LIHWAP assistance is limited to one relief payment per eligible household.</p>
Enrollment/Outreach	<p>Joint Letter (Clean Water Action, Community Water Center – El Centro Comunitario Por El Agua, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability,</p> <p>Expanded assistance relief alone is likely insufficient to ensure success; CSD must work to ensure robust outreach is being provided both to customers of enrolled water systems and to the water systems in the state that have not enrolled to establish direct pay agreements.</p>	<p>Thank you for your feedback.</p>
Enrollment/Outreach	<p>Joint Letter (Clean Water Action, Community Water Center – El Centro Comunitario Por El Agua, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability,</p> <p>We appreciate that the Local Service Providers (LSPs) ensure broad statewide coverage, but we’ve noticed that their efforts to provide assistance - at least on their websites - seem largely limited to English-speaking populations. Expanding language access is critically important in order to reach as</p>	<p>Thank you for your feedback.</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	<p>many at-risk households as possible. In addition, LSPs should provide multiple options for applying for assistance, including working with participating utilities to directly reach out to potentially eligible ratepayers. We would note that simply providing a link to the LSP websites is only useful if those websites are improved; it may be more effective for participating utilities to just send applications and eligibility requirements directly to past due customers. CSD should establish basic outreach efforts for LSPs, and require regular reporting of program metrics and including a public feedback loop.</p>	
<p>HORNE</p>	<p>Joint Letter (Clean Water Action, Community Water Center – El Centro Comunitario Por El Agua, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability:</p> <p>10% of the federal funding for the LIHWAP program has been allocated for outreach, yet there are no details in the plan for how CSD is overseeing HORNE LLP in their outreach efforts to public water systems. While we appreciate that 90% of Californians are served by participating public water systems, that still leaves millions of Californians without access. For instance, the Fresno LSP lists 17 participating water systems in their LIHWAP program: unfortunately, there are 110 community water systems in Fresno County. We suggest that CSD provide details, including metrics of success, to the public about how HORNE LLP is conducting</p>	<p>To clarify, the 10 percent allocated is for the local service providers to conduct outreach to low-income households and perform eligibility determinations. CSD is using State Administration funds to contract with HORNE. CSD performed initial state-level outreach to community water systems, wastewater systems, and third-party billing entities (collectively called water systems) via the State Water Resources Control Board and associations to inform water systems of the LIHWAP enrollment process and to encourage enrollment. CSD also conducted targeted outreach via HORNE to ensure maximum statewide coverage. Additionally, CSD established a referral system to encourage local service providers to refer water systems to HORNE for</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	<p>outreach to small water systems and amend this plan to include a timeline for HORNE LLP to conduct outreach to all water systems in California.</p>	<p>enrollment. CSD continues to both enroll water systems through the referral systems and to enroll water systems by submitting an interest form via CSD's website at https://www.csd.ca.gov/Pages/LIHWAP.aspx.</p>
Immigration Status	<p>Joint Letter (Clean Water Action, Community Water Center – El Centro Comunitario Por El Agua, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability):</p> <p>Finally, we continue to urge CSD to explore ways to better serve Californians without requiring proof of immigration status, particularly by using the funds appropriated in California's 2022-2023 budget.</p>	<p>Thank you for your feedback.</p>
Level of Assistance	<p>California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)</p> <p>It is unclear how LSPs will be determining the level of assistance for each customer. We would appreciate clarification on whether income scale information will be provided to LSPs to determine the level of assistance to be provided to each customer or, in the alternative, clarification on how LSPs will determine the level of assistance. (Guidelines page 7).</p>	<p>CSD will provide local service providers with a benefit matrix that establishes benefit amounts based on income and household size. CSD used the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) 2021 water and sewer allowances to help determine benefit amounts by county. Please refer to the benefit tables released with the revised Program Guidelines for benefit tables by county.</p>
Prioritization	<p>California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)</p>	<p>Until a local service provider's LIHWAP funding starts to run low, agencies will be working on a first come, first served basis. We expect agencies to prioritize arrearage</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	<p>The new Guidelines language does not give directions to LSPs for how prioritization of arrears should be operationalized. The expanded eligibility requirements make clear that applications for both arrearage and non-arrearage benefits should be processed on a first-come, first-served basis, which conflicts with prioritization of one applicant type over the other. If prioritization were to occur, it would likely delay processing of applications. Given that funding must be disbursed by August 2023 and the low application rate through the first three months of the program, LIHWAP should prioritize rapid processing of all applications. For clarity, we recommend removing the Department of Community Services and Development Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program Update to Program Guidelines Page 2 of 2 language directing prioritization of arrearage applicants and instead emphasize first-come, first-served processing. Without this removal, LSPs will be required to individually interpret “prioritization” resulting in differing service provision across the state.</p>	<p>benefits over non-arrearage benefits as they begin to run out of funding for the program. The decision as when to apply service prioritization will be determined by individual LSP.</p>
Credit	<p>California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)</p> <p>We have heard some concerns from our members regarding the benefit calculation. Many utilities’ internal systems are not designed to hold credit for usage over time to draw down bill credit. Some utility systems will auto-generate a refund to the</p>	<p>Federal rules require that any remaining balance of a LIHWAP benefit be carried forward and applied solely toward future water and/or wastewater account charges until liquidated.</p> <p>As required by federal law, the non-arrearage benefit payments are structured to</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	<p>customer. This was an issue with the California Water and Wastewater Arrearage Payment Program (CWWAPP) and utilities had to individually code accounts to credit and manually manage individual accounts that were impacted. This is not reasonable or sustainable for utility staff and resources. We suggest that the total benefit be held by HORNE LLP in lieu of the utilities and be sent to utilities to apply to accounts during billing cycles.</p>	<p>provide the highest payments to households with the lowest incomes, considering water cost, need, and household size. They are intended to offset a household’s financial burden for residential water and wastewater services over a short period of time.</p> <p>Consequently, the LIHWAP benefit is likely to exceed what the customer immediately owes, resulting in a LIHWAP credit that is to be used to offset future water and/or wastewater charges and associated fees.</p> <p>In accordance with federal requirements, water systems that are not able to carry forward an account credit or ensure a remaining balance of a LIHWAP be carried forward and applied solely toward future water and/or wastewater charges are not eligible to receive non-arrearage assistance benefits on behalf of their customers. (However, they may still participate in the arrearage assistance component of LIHWAP.)</p>
Benefit Calculation	<p>California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)</p> <p>We also recommend a straightforward benefit calculation methodology to better represent possible benefits. For example, the calculation could take the customer’s most recent bill and</p>	<p>At this time, CSD has already established our benefit matrix for our updated LIHWAP program. CSD will consider additional recommendations when we plan for the state-initiated LIHWAP program.</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	<p>multiply it by the number of months the customer is looking to cover. Another example is to add the \$11 per additional household to the HUD allowance before applying the poverty group multiplier to scale more appropriately.</p>	
Application	<p>California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)</p> <p>While the proposed changes are important to secure assistance for low-income families that are not in arrears, the structural issues with the program persist. It is difficult and confusing for customers to apply for benefits. The application requires significant time and documentation and is burdensome for customers. It can be confusing to customers that they need to reach out to an organization other than their water/wastewater provider to receive water/wastewater relief. Overall, this expanded eligibility does not solve the fundamental barriers to enrollment. Therefore, we recommend taking these steps to make relief easier to access: 1) remove the requirement for renters to provide a signed landlord agreement, 2) reduce the amount of documentation required for income verification, and 3) allow income verification for the benefit calculation by one individual within a household.</p>	<p>Thank you for your recommendation; however, at this time, CSD is not able to make these changes to the current program. We appreciate the feedback and will investigate these options for state-initiated LIHWAP.</p>

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
Pledge system	<p>Central Coast Energy Services</p> <p>Moving forward with the state legislated LIHWAP 2.0, we encourage CSD to implement a pledge system for low-income customers at immediate risk of disconnection and end water shutoffs for low-income Californians unable to pay their water and wastewater bills.</p>	CSD will take this recommendation into consideration for the state-initiated LIHWAP.
	<p>Central Coast Energy Services</p> <p>Moving forward with state legislated LIHWAP 2.0, we encourage CSD to consider additional program modifications, such as revising the requirement requiring LIHWAP benefits to be paid directly to water systems. As it states in SB 187, CSD has the authority to remove federally imposed rules attached to the original LIHWAP funding that require water system engagement, which would allow CSD to expand eligibility to serve more low-income Californians and revise the requirement requiring LIHWAP benefits to be paid directly to water systems. The smoothest and most expansive enrollment process would mirror the current LIHEAP program direct customer payment process.</p>	CSD will take this recommendation into consideration for the state-initiated LIHWAP
	<p>Central Coast Energy Services</p> <p>To encourage local service providers to invest in the long-term implementation of this program, we strongly encourage the Administration to work with the Federal Government and California Legislature</p>	Thank you for your feedback.

November 29, 2022 LIHWAP Public Meeting Written and Verbal Comments & Questions

Category	Comment	CSD Response
	to ensure there is long-term funding for permanent water assistance programs.	



915 L Street., Suite 1210
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 326-5800
CMUA.org

December 2, 2022

Submitted via email to: LIHWAP@csd.ca.gov

Department of Community Services and Development
Attention: Sarah Nowshiravan-Burrue, Energy and Environmental Services Division
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite #100
Sacramento, CA 95833

Subject: Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program Update to Program Guidelines

Dear Ms. Nowshiravan-Burrue:

The California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Department of Community Services and Development's (CSD) Updated Program Guidelines (Guidelines) for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). CMUA represents over 50 public water agencies that serve water to 75 percent of California and is committed to working in collaboration with CSD to ensure continued successful implementation of LIHWAP.

We applaud CSD for implementing LIHWAP and want to see the funding distributed to Californians in need. We understand there are many customers still with arrearages and we urge CSD and Local Service Providers (LSPs) to ensure those customers receive assistance. CMUA has been working with the legislature and interested parties on a proposal to develop a long-term low-income assistance program to help low-income customers with their bills and we are hopeful this shift in policy to cover current bills through LIHWAP is a positive step in the continued larger conversation for enacting a statewide low-income water customer assistance program. We offer a few specific comments on the Guidelines.

Area for Clarification

It is unclear how LSPs will be determining the level of assistance for each customer. We would appreciate clarification on whether income scale information will be provided to LSPs to determine the level of assistance to be provided to each customer or, in the alternative, clarification on how LSPs will determine the level of assistance. (Guidelines page 7).

Prioritization

The new Guidelines language does not give directions to LSPs for how prioritization of arrears should be operationalized. The expanded eligibility requirements make clear that applications for both arrearage and non-arrearage benefits should be processed on a first-come, first-served basis, which conflicts with prioritization of one applicant type over the other. If prioritization were to occur, it would likely delay processing of applications. Given that funding must be disbursed by August 2023 and the low application rate through the first three months of the program, LIHWAP should prioritize rapid processing of all applications. For clarity, we recommend removing the

language directing prioritization of arrearage applicants and instead emphasize first-come, first-served processing. Without this removal, LSPs will be required to individually interpret “prioritization” resulting in differing service provision across the state.

Benefit Calculation

We have heard some concerns from our members regarding the benefit calculation. Many utilities’ internal systems are not designed to hold credit for usage over time to draw down bill credit. Some utility systems will auto-generate a refund to the customer. This was an issue with the California Water and Wastewater Arrearage Payment Program (CWWAPP) and utilities had to individually code accounts to credit and manually manage individual accounts that were impacted. This is not reasonable or sustainable for utility staff and resources. We suggest that the total benefit be held by HORNE LLP in lieu of the utilities and be sent to utilities to apply to accounts during billing cycles.

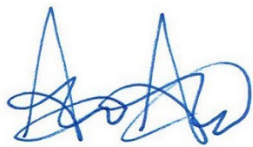
We also recommend a straightforward benefit calculation methodology to better represent possible benefits. For example, the calculation could take the customer’s most recent bill and multiply it by the number of months the customer is looking to cover. Another example is to add the \$11 per additional household to the HUD allowance before applying the poverty group multiplier to scale more appropriately.

Structural Program Issues

While the proposed changes are important to secure assistance for low-income families that are not in arrears, the structural issues with the program persist. It is difficult and confusing for customers to apply for benefits. The application requires significant time and documentation and is burdensome for customers. It can be confusing to customers that they need to reach out to an organization other than their water/wastewater provider to receive water/wastewater relief. Overall, this expanded eligibility does not solve the fundamental barriers to enrollment. Therefore, we recommend taking these steps to make relief easier to access: 1) remove the requirement for renters to provide a signed landlord agreement, 2) reduce the amount of documentation required for income verification, and 3) allow income verification for the benefit calculation by one individual within a household.

CMUA and its member agencies are very committed to the distribution of this available funding. We appreciate CSD’s continued commitment to engaging CMUA. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me at aabergel@cmua.org.

Sincerely,



Andrea Abergel
Manager of Water Policy
California Municipal Utilities Association



Central Coast Energy Services
PO BOX 2707
Watsonville, Ca. 95077
(831) 761-7080
www.EnergyServices.org

San Francisco Peninsula Energy Services
1426 Fillmore St, Suite #318
San Francisco, Ca. 94115
(415) 749-5600
www.SFPES.org



December 2, 2022

California Department of Community Services and Development
Sarah Nowshiravan-BurrueI
Energy and Environmental Services Division
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite #100
Sacramento, CA 95833

Re: Comments on Revised Program Guidelines for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (As Revised November 18, 2022)

Dear Ms. Nowshiravan-BurrueI:

On behalf of Central Coast Energy Services (CCES) and San Francisco Peninsula Energy Services (SFPES), we thank the Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) for the opportunity to comment on the recently revised program guidelines for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). We strongly support CSD's modifications to expand the eligibility of LIHWAP to include current charges on water and wastewater bills. However, we would also like to offer additional comments and recommended changes we have advocated for since the inception of LIHWAP that will further improve program uptake and enrollment based on CCES and SFPES experience as service implementers.

SFPES is an extension of CCES and both organizations offer low-income Californians utility and water bill payment assistance, home weatherization, consumer education, and job training services. Our organizations implement LIHWAP throughout the low-income communities of Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Mateo counties, and the City and County of San Francisco.

Below, please see CCES' specific comments on the revised program guidelines:

- 1. Since the first LIHWAP Working Group Meeting in July of 2021 CCES joined other Local Service Providers (LSPs) in advocating for CSD to streamline the planning process and modify program eligibility to offer LIHWAP assistance for arrearage and non-arrearage water and wastewater bills CCES has strongly encouraged expanding eligibility to avoid programming delays and the appearance of poor local performance in getting financial assistance to California's most vulnerable households. The delay is regrettable.**

The economic impacts of the pandemic and recent inflation have forced millions of Californians to make the impossible decisions between affording food, rent, healthcare, or utilities. While many low-income Californians receive electric and gas utility rate assistance, less than 20% of the state's low-income population served by community water systems (CWS) benefit from a low-income water rate assistance program. When low-income households cannot afford to pay their water bill, they are at risk of consuming less healthy water. Low-income households will also consume less of other vital goods and services to pay for the water they need or risk accruing hundreds of dollars in debt and the discontinuation of their water service.

According to the 2020 report by the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)¹, recent data suggests about 60% of Californians (or 2.6 million households) do not directly receive a water bill. Which means they most likely pay for their water indirectly through their rent. Whether access to water is paid directly or indirectly through rent, the cost of water still poses a burden to low-income customers that will benefit from LIHWAP. Furthermore, low-income customers that cannot pay their combined rent and water bill face serious threat of eviction, making it just as vital to ensure these households have access to necessary water assistance.

For these reasons, we have been advocating CSD to support expanding LIHWAP's eligibility to customers before they accrue arrearages rather than waiting until they are in crisis to provide support. Providing all low-income Californians with financial assistance to help pay their water bills before they face the immediate threat of a water shut-off is a vital way the state can support the provision of necessities for all low-income utility ratepayers. While CSD's modification to expand LIHWAP eligibility is a critical improvement to serve low-income customers in need of assistance, it has been a network suggestion since the start of this program. Unfortunately, because the inclusion to pay current water and wastewater bills have not been finalized, LSPs have lost five months of enrolling low-income customers and alleviating the conditions of poverty in Phase II implementation and funds remain unexpended statewide.

Below, please see CCES-specific recommendations to streamline inherent difficulties:

- 1. Moving forward with the state legislated LIHWAP 2.0, we encourage CSD to implement a pledge system for low-income customers at immediate risk of disconnection and end water shutoffs for low-income Californians unable to pay their water and wastewater bills.**

CSD has not implemented a statewide water shutoff prevention program as with the LIHEAP shutoff prevention program for low-income customers unable to pay their utility bills. Under LIHWAP 2.0, we recommend intervention in the practice of water shutoffs as a debt collection tool, and those enrolled in the program become eligible for shutoff protection. Many low-income Californians remain affected by the ongoing economic crisis and climate change challenges wherein, they find that costs for goods and services are sharply rising while their incomes do not. We ask that CSD make a serious commitment to promote equity by helping low-income customers afford essential water services. Discontinuing the water of low-income customers as a debt collection tool is not a justified method of recovering the cost of providing service. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the pandemic, access to water is a public health necessity, and water shutoffs will increase health risks.

Currently, to prevent water shutoffs for customers, each LSP must establish an agreement with every CWS in their area without the programmatic support of CSD. This process is often time-consuming and displaces administrative resources for LSPs that could otherwise be used to enroll LIHWAP customers. For example, since July 2022, CSD has received several requests from LSPs to share the required CWSs contact information on behalf of LIHWAP customers to avoid shutoffs or payment delays. CSD has indicated they are working on submitting a comprehensive list of this requested information to send to LSPs. CCES requests the information include (1) the status of all utilities (including systems *not* enrolled), (2) the CORE entry date, and (3) the point of contact for water system utilities as indicated by CSD.

- 2. Moving forward with the state legislated LIHWAP 2.0, we encourage CSD to consider additional program modifications, such as revising the requirement requiring LIHWAP benefits to be paid**

¹https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/conservation_portal/assistance/docs/ab401_report.pdf

directly to water systems. As it states in SB 187, CSD has the authority to remove federally imposed rules attached to the original LIHWAP funding that require water system engagement, which would allow CSD to expand eligibility to serve more low-income Californians and revise the requirement requiring LIHWAP benefits be paid directly to water systems.² The smoothest and most expansive enrollment process would mirror the current Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) direct customer payment process.

The current LIHWAP enrollment process requires customers to enroll through a third-party vendor that makes direct payments to each CWS on their behalf. This process has added another barrier to delaying the enrollment of low-income customers. Furthermore, for multi-family customers, enrollment may require consent and direct participation of each landlord. This process has added additional administrative burdens for LSPs since many CWS lack the staffing resources as they claim for expedited assistance services or even enrollment in the program.

The smoothest and most expansive enrollment process would mirror the current Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit process. Current LIHEAP guidelines allow LSPs to provide benefits directly to customers. Modifying LIHWAP guidelines to reflect this would cut down on administrative burdens and allow LSPs to get benefits to each customer much faster than is currently happening. While we understand that it is a federal requirement that benefits be paid directly to owners and operators of public systems, we strongly encourage CSD to review and modify this requirement for LIHWAP 2.0.

3. To encourage local service providers to invest in the long-term implementation of this program, we strongly encourage the Administration to work with the Federal Government and California Legislature to ensure there is long-term funding for permanent water assistance programs.

According to a voluntary survey conducted by the SWRCB of the CWS, 73 percent of respondents said yes or maybe when asked, “Do you see a need for a permanent, statewide water payment assistance program?” This survey indicates that CWS acknowledges the majority of low-income Californians currently lack access to affordable drinking water. Long-standing sources of rate data indicate that the rising retail price of water has dramatically outpaced inflation in California (and the U.S. more broadly) over the last decade. Even more concerning, financial analysts project the retail price of water to rise significantly in California over the coming years.

With such a limited allocation of current funding for LIHWAP, LSPs are fearful that they may not be able to offer their low-income customers these services in future years. The trends in the cost of water underscore that California must commit now to funding a long-term solution to affordable drinking water. We encourage CSD to work with the Administration and the Federal Government to ensure in the long term that the low-income customers we serve will continue to have access to critical water assistance funds.

In conclusion, we appreciate CSD for revising LIHWAP guidelines to expand customer eligibility, given the low participation in the program over the first five months of Phase II implementation. The low-income households that we serve cannot afford any more program delays. We are encouraging CSD to prioritize releasing new LIHWAP guidelines and contracts by January 2023 for LSPs to expedite the required program changes to promote equity by helping low-income customers afford essential water services.

² https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB187

CCES is committed to working with CSD to ensure increased enrollment and benefits for all low-income customers we serve.

Sincerely,



Dennis Osmer
Executive Director

Dear Department of Community Services and Development,

Could a provision please be added to the LIHWAP guidelines to allow those that have already received a LIWHAP grant to receive the full LIHWAP grant based on their income level?

LIHWAP assistance has been based on an outstanding balance, and that effectively limited grants to only one billing cycle's outstanding balance. My water provider (City of Thousand Oaks) quickly assesses fees and then proceeds to water shut-off so I was not able to accrue much of an outstanding balance.

Can the guidelines include a provision that each household may to receive the full LIHWAP amount based on their income level, less any LIWHAP payments already received?

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Debbie Baize



December 2, 2022

Sarah Nowshirvan-BurrueI
Energy and Environmental Services Division
Department of Community Services and Development
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite #100
Sacramento, CA 95833
Email: LIHWAP@CSD.ca.gov

Re: Program Guidelines for Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) as amended Nov. 18, 2022

Dear Ms. Nowshiravn-BurrueI,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to support the November 18, 2022 changes to the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) proposed by the Department of Community Services and Development (CSD), and offer further suggestions to improve delivery of assistance through the program to ensure federal funding can be provided to those who need it in a timely manner.

According to the Quarterly Reports on the United States Health and Human Services' LIHWAP Data Portal, California is behind in getting benefits out the door, having only assisted 433 households by June 30, 2022.¹ For comparison, during the same time period, New York, South Carolina, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois have assisted over 10,000 customers each, Pennsylvania has assisted over 27,000 customers, and Kentucky, Georgia, and North Carolina have assisted over 30,000 customers each. California must do better.

CSD's proposed revisions to allow customers to access LIHWAP funding for current bills, in addition to past due bills, will allow more customers to access relief without having to wait until they are facing shut offs. We believe that this could assist with ensuring California can expedite delivery of assistance and be competitive with other states.

¹ United States Department of Health and Human Services, LIHWAP Data Portal Quarterly Report, available at <https://lihwap-hhs-acf.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/quarterly-snapshot>.

Expanded assistance relief alone is likely insufficient to ensure success; CSD must work to ensure robust outreach is being provided both to customers of enrolled water systems and to the water systems in the state that have not enrolled to establish direct pay agreements.

We appreciate that the Local Service Providers (LSPs) ensure broad statewide coverage, but we've noticed that their efforts to provide assistance - at least on their websites - seem largely limited to English-speaking populations. Expanding language access is critically important in order to reach as many at-risk households as possible. In addition, LSPs should provide multiple options for applying for assistance, including working with participating utilities to directly reach out to potentially eligible ratepayers. We would note that simply providing a link to the LSP websites is only useful if those websites are improved; it may be more effective for participating utilities to just send applications and eligibility requirements directly to past due customers. CSD should establish basic outreach efforts for LSPs, and require regular reporting of program metrics, and including a public feedback loop.

10% of the federal funding for the LIHWAP program has been allocated for outreach, yet there are no details in the plan for how CSD is overseeing HORNE LLP in their outreach efforts to public water systems. While we appreciate that 90% of Californians are served by participating public water systems, that still leaves millions of Californians without access. For instance, the Fresno LSP lists 17 participating water systems in their LIHWAP program; unfortunately, there are 110 community water systems in Fresno County. We suggest that CSD provide details, including metrics of success, to the public about how HORNE LLP is conducting outreach to small water systems and amend this plan to include a timeline for HORNE LLP to conduct outreach to all water systems in California.

Finally, we continue to urge CSD to explore ways to better serve Californians without requiring proof of immigration status, particularly by using the funds appropriated in California's 2022-2023 budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. We believe that with more emphasis and oversight on outreach, CSD can allow California to successfully spend down the federal funds in time. We support expanded benefits and urge CSD to continue to modify the guidelines to support better outreach.

Sincerely,

Kyle Jones
Policy & Legal Director
Community Water Center

Jennifer Clary
California Director
Clean Water Action

Michael Claiborne
Directing Attorney
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability