April 01, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
California Governor
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted Via Email

RE: Reject Proposals to Loosen Water Protections

Dear Governor Newsom:

The undersigned organizations understand that California is facing an unprecedented public health crisis, and that many people are experiencing extreme hardship from healthcare to economic impacts due to COVID-19. But during this difficult time, we write to request that your administration maintain strong, protective regulatory processes that ensure safe and clean water for California’s communities and ecosystems. We appreciate the State Water Board’s commitment to “timely compliance by the regulated community [for] all Water Board orders and other requirements,” as announced in the Board’s March 20, 2020 COVID-19 Update. At the same time, however, we understand that regulated entities are still requesting that state agencies roll back protective measures related to water. We urge you to reject these requests and to remain committed to prioritizing public health and the availability of safe and clean water for all Californians.

As detailed in a March 18, 2020 letter sent to you from a number of environmental justice organizations, environmental organizations, and scientists, access to water is foundational for public health for all Californians, but even more so in vulnerable communities threatened by the possibility of water shutoffs during this time. We echo this point and emphasize that the quality of water is just as important. Requests to suspend safeguards that protect water quality and allow even a de minimis amount of water pollution should not be tolerated at any time. These requests are especially inappropriate during a pandemic that threatens both the health of all Californians and the stability of California’s economy, and the spread of which can be limited by the routine use of clean water.

The state’s regulatory processes are grounded in a commitment to ensure safe and clean water for Californians to drink, bathe, and cook with, and for California’s fish and wildlife to thrive. These processes are indispensable during a public health emergency and require continued enforcement of regulations and permitting conditions to be effective against multiple threats.
One of these threats being the climate crisis, which continues to impact the water quality and public health conditions of many California communities. It is unnecessary to halt and/or roll back progress of these regulatory processes in an effort to prioritize and fight the current pandemic, the severity and magnitude of which we do not doubt. But state actions during a pandemic should not contradict the state’s commitment to combat other public health threats. And Californians distressed by the increasing number of public health and economic concerns that COVID-19 presents should not have additional concerns about the quality of their water.

We appreciate the state’s work during these challenging times, and look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

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Clean Water Action

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CC: President Pro Tem Toni Atkins, California State Senate
Speaker Anthony Rendon, California State Assembly
Secretary Jared Blumenfeld, California Environmental Protection Agency
Chair Joaquin Esquivel, State Water Resources Control Board
Deputy Cabinet Secretary Christine Hironaka, Governor’s Office
Deputy Legislative Secretary Rachel Wagoner, Governor’s Office
Executive Director Eileen Sobeck, State Water Resources Control Board
Kip Lipper, Office of the Senate President Pro Tem
Alf Brandt, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Marie Liu, Office of the Assembly Speaker