



COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT

Established in 1918 as a public agency

GENERAL MANAGER

Jim Barrett

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

Robert Cheng

CLERK OF THE BOARD

Sylvia Bermudez

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

Dan Charlton

May 29, 2024

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Raul Ruiz
U.S. House of Representatives
2342 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Ruiz:

RE: Co-sponsor Request for H.R. 8032, “Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program Establishment Act”

On behalf of Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), I am writing to respectfully request your co-sponsorship of H.R. 8032 – the *Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Establishment Act*. This legislation seeks to permanently reauthorize LIHWAP, aimed at distributing grants through states and tribes to aid low-income households in settling overdue payments and covering associated costs related to drinking water and wastewater services. LIHWAP provides those who need the monetary relief, the direct support necessary for the essential public services of water and wastewater.

Established in 1918, CVWD was formed with the core mission of safeguarding and preserving water resources, primarily for agricultural irrigation purposes. Over the years, CVWD has evolved into a multifaceted agency serving a vast area of approximately 1,000 square miles, stretching from the San Gorgonio Pass to the Salton Sea, predominantly within Riverside County but also including portions of Imperial and San Diego counties. Today, CVWD offers a wide array of water-related services, including delivering irrigation and drinking water, groundwater replenishment, storm water protection, wastewater treatment and recycling, and promoting water conservation.

LIHWAP must be reauthorized to address the pressing financial challenges faced by low-income households. LIHWAP was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the risks of service shutoffs. LIHWAP delivered relief to over 150,000 households nationally according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Further, LIHWAP helped restore water service, or prevented disconnection, to 91,000 of those households. Unfortunately, LIHWAP’s authorization began to lapse in certain states last September, stripping crucial support away from those who relied on it. This legislation is of critical importance to permanently reauthorize the program.

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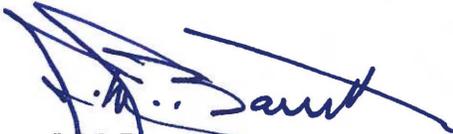
LIHWAP benefits will continue to target households with low incomes, which bear the greatest burden in terms of the proportion of their income spent on home drinking water and wastewater services. The *LIHWAP Establishment Act* expands eligibility criteria to include individuals receiving assistance from programs such as Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, nearly one-third of Californians live near or below the poverty line. Further, an additional 3.2 million more residents would fall into poverty without social safety net programs such as LIHWAP. In Riverside County alone, 10.9% of residents live below the poverty line per the 2021 census. Safety net programs such as LIHWAP hold the potential to deliver life-changing relief to communities most in need.

CVWD requests your support in creating a permanent low-income water customer assistance program. This legislation acknowledges that a gap exists between the costs of providing the public this essential resource, investing in reliable and resilient infrastructure, meeting increasingly stringent regulatory mandates at the federal and state levels, and the ability of ratepayers to keep up with the associated costs. The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program will mean less communities will experience water and financial insecurity for generations to come.

Thank you for taking the time to consider co-sponsorship of this important bipartisan legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. M. Barrett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J. M. Barrett
General Manager