

State Water Resources & Control Board meeting
Monday August 14, 2017
San Diego Workers Benefit Council Spokeswoman Maria Lopez Speech

My name is Maria Lopez and I am speaking for the San Diego Workers Benefit Council which is a body of workers representing 30,000 low-paid service, domestic and other low-paid workers and their families in San Diego. I am here to present the demands of our Council.

1. Stop the shutoffs NOW! Water is a right, not a privilege – WATER IS LIFE.

There are over 24,000 water shutoffs in San Diego every year – that's nearly one in ten San Diegans. A minimum-wage job, which most of our members have, doesn't pay enough to afford the rising costs of water, which *doubled* between 2005-2015. In 2013, the city of San Diego raised the rates by 15%; in 2015, they raised it another 40%. Water in San Diego now costs *twice* the national average.

The result is nearly 10% of San Diego's residents are shut off a year when they cannot pay their bills. These families cannot bathe, cannot wash dishes, and it means they cannot flush the toilet. This is a public health crisis! Low-paid work in San Diego is mostly *service* work in the tourism industry, serving the public, and no water means service workers may spread disease. Families are forced to choose between paying their water bill and paying their rent, their electric bill, their food budget or cover medical needs – and all *those* costs are going up too!

The City charges residential customers a tiered rate. The median rent in San Diego is \$2,452, so service workers who earn only minimum wages live 10-12 in the same house. Higher usage pushes households into the next tier. However, commercial rate payers pay only a single rate. Eliminate punitive tiers for residential rate payers throughout California.

The Workers Benefit Council members have been fighting these shut offs for five years with hundreds of hours of advocacy, letter-writing campaigns to the City Council and mobilizing to two city public hearings. Volunteer advocates fight up to ten shutoffs weekly. **But 66 shutoffs continue every single day.** The city says they do not have the resources because they have to pay off international financiers – bondholders such as JP Morgan Asset Management and Fidelity, owned by Bloomberg – on the backs of the working poor.

The State Water Board's mission statement says that your board is responsible "for the protection of... public health... for the benefit of present and future generations." We demand your Board comply with this and **stop the shutoffs! Implement a moratorium now!**

Your proposal to have a state fund to offset water bills for poor households by 20% or even 35% will not stop this water crisis. Do not charge one group of rate payers to subsidize another – this pits one group against the other. Some of our members have had their water shut off for over a year because they could not pay their bill!

In 2010, the United Nations recognized the human right to water and sanitation and recommends that no household shall pay more than 3% of their income for water.

The U.S. government accepted and approved the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 as adopted by 193 nations of the United Nations, including the U.S. Goal #6 states "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all."

State laws AB 685 states that "Every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water . . ."

Comply with international and state law, we demand a moratorium of water shut offs.

2. *There are solutions!*

The state can fund desalination plants, bring their costs down through the use of solar, build more water recycling plants – there are many ways to guarantee all Californians have access to safe and affordable water as required by state law. This can all be funded by cutting corporate tax breaks which cost us 48 billion dollars a year!

Tell Google, Facebook, Apple, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin that they need to pay taxes like the rest of us. Working families pay taxes and we cannot afford our most basic necessity: water. Google, Facebook and Apple have billions and do NOT pay taxes.

There are 84,000 fracking wells in California mining for natural gas, each consuming between 2 and 11 million gallons of fresh water per injection well. Expand access to potable water resources by stopping their destructive fracking which also pollutes our water!

If the state does not have enough money, then go to the federal government. The recent budget exemplifies there are ample funds to come to the defense and protection of low income working people's right to survive. The U.S. managed to fund and create new water systems for Afghanistan at taxpayers' expense. If they can do it there, they can do it here!

In closing, our Council demands your board find a way to ensure all Californians have access to safe and affordable water and **STOP THE SHUTOFFS NOW!** Thank you.