



Water Quality Authority



August 19, 2021

Members of the Legislature:

Our organizations represent areas of the state that have been impacted by PFAS groundwater contamination. The cost for public water systems in California to treat drinking water contaminated by per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) contamination is now anticipated to exceed \$500 million, and the ultimate scope of the problem is not yet fully defined. Contamination of groundwater with PFAS is compounding the impacts of the drought and of arrearages associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as explained below.

PFAS comprises a family of over 5,000 chemical compounds used in products like non-stick and water repellent products, fire-fighting foams, cleaning products, polishes and waxes, electronics manufacturing and other industrial activities, and certain types of food packaging.

Existing law requires a water system to stop well production or issue a public notice if perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances are detected above a regulatory response level. A water system operator must remediate the PFAS-affected well or remove the well from operation. Remediation can cost over \$4 million per well. If the well is removed from operation, ratepayers must pay up to 50% more to import water compared to extracting and treating groundwater—and shifting to imported surface water supply places added pressure on drought-impacted water supplies. Water system operators are in dire need of financial assistance to maintain affordable water rates. There are few public funding options other than ratepayer revenue to pay for well treatment facilities.

Water system operators are experiencing financial constraints because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The State Water Resources Control Board released a study in January that estimates 12 percent of households in California have not paid their water bills, creating a "water debt" that today exceeds \$1 billion. This reduction in revenue places water operators in a precarious position as they seek to treat PFAS-affected wells.

We support the inclusion of at least \$250 million for PFAS treatment in the drought and water resilience package in the state budget as a good-faith investment in maintaining an uninterrupted supply of affordable water for Californians impacted by PFAS contamination, as well as drought and the COVID-19 pandemic.