



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

SEP 28 2022

To the Members of the California State Senate:

I am returning Senate Bill 222 without my signature.

This bill establishes a Water Rate Assistance Program and Water Rate Assistance Fund to provide water affordability assistance for drinking and wastewater services to low-income ratepayers. The State Water Resources Control Board would be required to administer the program, and community water systems and wastewater systems would be subsequently required to provide rate assistance to residential ratepayers. This is a permanent program that would not be implemented or initiated until funding is provided. At this time, there is no sustainable, ongoing funding identified.

Lowering costs and making sure that Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water is a top priority of this administration. The last two budgets have provided billions in rebates, debt relief, assistance grants, and free support services. For water costs alone, the 2021-22 Budget provided \$1 billion to the State Water Board for the California Water and Wastewater Arrearage Payment Program, which cleared unpaid water and wastewater debts resulting from the pandemic. This year, our 2022-23 budget added an additional \$200 million to the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program at the Department of Community Services and Development. These are programs that were both approved and funded by the Legislature.

I commend the author and stakeholders for their work during this Legislative session to craft a vision for such a program. However, this bill does not have any

funding identified, and because it is an ongoing program that would require all community water systems and wastewater systems to participate, signing this policy would result in significant General Fund pressures in the billions of dollars to continuously provide such assistance.

With our state facing lower-than-expected revenues over the first few months of this fiscal year, it is important to remain disciplined when it comes to spending, particularly spending that is ongoing. The Legislature sent measures with potential costs of well over \$20 billion in one-time spending commitments and more than \$10 billion in ongoing commitments not accounted for in the state budget. Bills with significant fiscal impact, such as this measure, should be considered and accounted for as part of the annual budget process.

For these reasons, I cannot sign this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Gavin Newsom", written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with sharp, angular strokes. The name "Gavin Newsom" is printed in a small, sans-serif font directly beneath the signature.

Gavin Newsom