

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS

Damon Connolly, Chair

SCR 3 (Laird) – As Introduced December 2, 2024

SENATE VOTE: 33-0

SUBJECT: Safe Drinking Water Act: 50th anniversary

SUMMARY: Commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA); celebrates the achievements and progress made thereunder; and, commits to the continued protection and improvement of California's drinking water resources. Specifically, **this resolution:**

Makes the following declarations:

- 1) Access to clean, safe drinking water is fundamental to the health, well-being, and prosperity of all people.
- 2) December 16, 2024, marks the 50th anniversary of the enactment of the SDWA, landmark legislation signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1974, which established vital protections to ensure the safety and quality of drinking water in the United States.
- 3) The SDWA has played a pivotal role in safeguarding public health by regulating contaminants in public water systems, establishing national drinking water standards, and requiring regular testing and reporting to ensure that communities have access to clean, safe drinking water.
- 4) Under the leadership of Governor Gavin Newsom, California has made significant investments to enhance and expand access to safe drinking water, particularly in disadvantaged communities that have been historically underserved.
- 5) Governor Newsom's administration has championed the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Program, which aims to provide long-term solutions for communities that lack access to safe drinking water by consolidating systems, upgrading failing infrastructure, and providing emergency support where needed.
- 6) The administration has allocated over \$1.3 billion in funding for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, ensuring that critical upgrades to outdated systems are made to meet 21st century standards.
- 7) The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) plays a critical role in protecting public health and the environment, including ensuring access to safe and clean drinking water for all residents of California.
- 8) Under the leadership of Secretary Yana Garcia, CalEPA has prioritized equity and environmental justice by focusing on improving water quality in disadvantaged communities

and communities of color that have historically been underserved and disproportionately impacted by unsafe drinking water.

- 9) The State of California, as a leader in environmental stewardship and public health, has consistently implemented and enforced the provisions of the SDWA, furthering its commitment to ensuring that all Californians have access to clean and safe drinking water, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, and adopted the human right to water act, the first in the nation.
- 10) California has led the nation in adopting innovative drinking water standards, including the regulation of emerging contaminants such as perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances or PFAS, hexavalent chromium, and microplastics, developing advanced water treatment technologies, and promoting efforts to secure sustainable water resources in the face of climate change and drought.
- 11) The continued success of the SDWA has been bolstered by the dedicated efforts of local, state, and federal agencies, as well as the many scientists, engineers, public health professionals, and water utility operators who work tirelessly to maintain and improve water quality for all.
- 12) The 50th anniversary of the SDWA provides an opportunity to recognize the significant progress made in ensuring safe drinking water and to renew our commitment to meeting the challenges of the future, including addressing water system vulnerabilities, improving infrastructure, and ensuring equitable access to safe drinking water for all Californians.

Declares that it is:

- 1) Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, that the Legislature takes great pride in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the SDWA, celebrates the achievements and progress made under this essential law, and expresses its commitment to the continued protection and improvement of California's drinking water resources.
- 2) Resolved that the Legislature honors the ongoing efforts of those who work to ensure the safety of drinking water and encourages all Californians to recognize the importance of safe drinking water in promoting public health, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity; commends our local, state, and federal partners for continuing its long history of providing drinking water protections; and, conveys best wishes for a future filled with continued success and enduring commitment to serve all Californians wholesome and pure drinking water.
- 3) Resolved that the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes, pursuant to the federal SDWA, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to set standards for drinking water quality and to oversee the states,

localities, and water suppliers who implement those standards. (42 United States Code § 300 (f) et seq.)

- 2) Establishes the California SDWA to provide for the operation of public water systems and imposes on the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) various responsibilities and duties relating to the regulation of drinking water to protect public health. (Health & Safety Code § 116270 et seq.)
- 3) Establishes as policy of the state that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes. Requires all relevant state agencies to consider the human right to water state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and criteria are pertinent to the uses of water. (Water Code § 106.3)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed as non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the resolution: According to the author, "December 16, 2024 marks the 50th Anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act. This important Act was originally passed by Congress in 1974 to protect public health by regulating the nation's public drinking water supply. Since then, California has made significant progress to ensure safe drinking water access, and California remains steadfast in its commitment to enhance drinking water safety and accessibility across the state. While we celebrate 50 years of the Safe Drinking Water Act and all we have achieved, there is still work to be done. From combatting microplastics, PFAS, and the impacts of climate change, California must continue to be a leader and strive for safer drinking water for all Californians."

The federal SDWA: The federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), Title XIV of the Public Health Service Act, is the primary federal law to protect public water supplies from harmful contaminants. First enacted in 1974 and substantially amended in 1986, 1996, and 2018, the SDWA is administered by the US EPA through programs that establish national health-based drinking water standards and treatment requirements for public water supplies; finance drinking water infrastructure projects; promote water system compliance; and, control the underground injection of fluids to protect underground sources of drinking water.

The 1974 law established the current federal-state arrangement in which states may be delegated primary implementation and enforcement authority for the drinking water program. Forty-nine states have assumed this authority, including California. In California, the State Water Board, under the Division of Drinking Water, is responsible for implementing the SDWA.

Since the enactment of the SDWA, the US EPA has established drinking water standards for more than 90 contaminants, and, according to the US EPA, currently 92 percent of the national population supplied by community water systems receives drinking water that meets all health-based standards all of the time.

California and the SDWA: According to the State Water Board, "Over 98% of California's population is served by water systems that meet or exceed state and federal drinking water

standards, thanks partly to the [SDWA]. However, this still leaves about 750,000 people in California, many in small communities of color in unincorporated rural areas, who need reliable access to safe and affordable drinking water. The water and wastewater infrastructure in their communities suffer from decades of disinvestment brought about in some cases by discriminatory policies, like redlining, causing their water systems to fail due to a lack of maintenance, financial capacity, and know-how to stay ahead of emerging threats to water quality, like climate change and new contaminants of concern." The State Water Board also states, "California is celebrating 50 years of the [SDWA] while continuing to tackle challenges like microplastics and PFAS chemicals."

This resolution: The author's office notes, "SCR-3 ensures that we continue conversations about how to increase access to clean water in California and expresses the state's commitment to continued protection and improvement of drinking water resources. While we celebrate 50 years of the Safe Drinking Water Act and all we have achieved, we must also be reminded that we still have work to do. The 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act provides an opportunity to recognize the significant progress made in ensuring safe drinking water and to renew our commitment to meeting the challenges of the future, including addressing water system vulnerabilities, improving infrastructure, and ensuring equitable access to safe drinking water for all Californians."

Arguments in support: The California Association of Environmental Health Administrators (CAEHA) writes in support of this resolution, "SCR 3... recognizes and honors the 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act. This landmark legislation has played a crucial role in ensuring safe drinking water for the public, protecting public health, and preserving our environment. The Safe Drinking Water Act has been instrumental in setting standards for water quality, monitoring and regulating contaminants, and providing funding for water infrastructure improvements. Over the past five decades, it has significantly contributed to the reduction of waterborne diseases and the improvement of overall water quality across the nation. As we celebrate this milestone, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing efforts and challenges in maintaining and enhancing our water systems. SCR 3 serves as a reminder of the importance of resources for future generations."

The California State Association of Electrical Workers, the California State Pipe Trades Council, and the Western States Council of Sheet Metal Workers write in support of this resolution, "This measure recognizes the significant progress made in ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water and highlights the ongoing commitment required to protect California's drinking water systems. California has long been a leader in advancing the highest standards for water quality to safeguard public health. These efforts are especially critical in disadvantaged communities, where access to clean drinking water can transform lives. Policies such as the adoption of water-efficient plumbing codes and performance standards for lead-free plumbing components demonstrate California's leadership in addressing public health concerns and advancing innovative solutions to enhance water safety. We commend the Legislature for its continued efforts to improve and expand access to safe drinking water and for honoring the legacy of the Safe Drinking Water Act through this resolution. This milestone is an opportunity to reflect on the importance of water quality protections and to reaffirm a commitment to building a healthier and more sustainable future."

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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