

June 10, 2020

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Re: Strengthen S2526: New Jersey Needs a Mandatory Statewide Water Shut off Moratorium

Dear Senators:

We, the undersigned organizations, write in regards to SB 2526, which will help preserve access to water service during the COVID-19 crisis, but which we urge you to strengthen by mandating a water shutoff moratorium with restoration for all New Jerseyans previously disconnected for nonpayment. The current legislation authorizes individual utilities to adopt local protections for customers unable to afford water service, but falls short of ensuring that all New Jersey residents have access to affordable clean water during the pandemic.

The COVID 19 pandemic has left the nation with widespread loss of wages, millions of lost jobs, lost health insurance coverage and uncertainty about the future of thousands of small businesses across the country. The economic disaster in the wake of the pandemic will cause disproportionate and extreme economic distress for low-income families who will be hit with enormous bills to pay, including for water when the state of emergency is lifted.

The Center for Disease Control's top recommendation to help stop the spread of disease is thorough and frequent hand washing. Without access to water, people cannot follow this simple — yet crucial — public health measure. Households that have their water shut off will be even more vulnerable to the rampant spread of the coronavirus and the resulting economic hardships— which endangers their health and our communities.

We urge you to act now to amend the legislation to:

1. Mandate a statewide moratorium on household water shutoffs for nonpayment for all publicly owned and privately owned water providers, during and for 180 days after the COVID-19 state of emergency,
2. Require safe and immediate restoration of water service to all homes previously disconnected for nonpayment, and

3. Suspend all late fees, penalties, collection activities, service restoration fees, and water rate increases until at least 180 days following the end of the emergency and guarantee the availability of extended repayment plans for past due bills.

Water is a human right and access to safe, affordable water is a vital necessity for the health and safety of all New Jerseyans during the pandemic and after the state of emergency is lifted to prevent a resurgence of infections. Public health depends on universal water access. We need running water at home to keep ourselves and our communities safe. Water must be turned on for everyone right now, and stay turned on, for the safety of all New Jersey residents.

Sincerely,
350NJ-Rockland
Already Devalued and Devastated Homeowners of Parsippany
Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey
BlueWaveNJ
Central Jersey Environmental Defenders
Clean Water Action
Coalition Against the Pilgrim Pipeline - NJ
Coalition to Protect New York
Don't Gas the Meadowlands Coalition
Food & Water Watch New Jersey
Fransican Response to Fossil Fuel
HCDNNJ
Ironbound Community Corporation
Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry
MoveOn.org HobokenRESIST
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Jersey and New York Awareness Project -for Climate Justice
New Jersey Appleseed PILC
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Future
New Jersey Tenants Organization
New Jersey Working Families Alliance
NJ Sierra Club
NJ State Industrial Union Council
No Meadowlands Power Plant
People Demanding Action NJ
Possible Planet
Raritan Headwaters
Riverview Neighborhood Association
Sgt Anthony Park Neighborhood Association
The Wei LLC

UU FaithAction Environmental Justice Task Force