

ALEX PADILLA

U.S. SENATOR *for* CALIFORNIA

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Establishment Act

Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Calif.)

More than 1 in 3 Americans struggle to pay their water bills. Over the last decade, household water and sewer bills have risen exponentially, increasing by more than 50 percent and rising more quickly than inflation, medical bills, or electricity bills.

Background:

In 2020 and 2021, Congress provided \$1.1 billion to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish the first-ever national water assistance program, the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP).

LIHWAP successfully served 1.4 million households in 49 States, five U.S. Territories, DC, and 97 Tribes^[1], helping households pay their water bills, prevent water shutoffs, and restore drinking water and wastewater services.

However, LIHWAP expired on September 30, 2023, leaving millions of households vulnerable to growing water debt and water shutoffs. Congress must provide the necessary Congressional authorization for a permanent LIHWAP beyond the COVID-19 emergency.

Specifically, the *LIHWAP Establishment Act* would:

- Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator to establish the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program; authorize grants to States, Territories, and Tribes to assist low-income households in paying arrearages and other rates charged to such households for drinking water or wastewater services.
- Provide technical assistance to rural, Tribal, and underserved owners or operators of public water systems or treatment works.
- Align income eligibility with the Low Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income, and means-tested veterans' programs.
- Transfer authority of the program from HHS to the EPA upon completion of the Rural and Low-Income Water Assistance Pilot Program authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The bill is supported by more than 100 organizations including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National League of Cities, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, National Association of Counties, National Association of Water Companies, American Business Water Coalition, American Water Works Association, Association of California Water Agencies, Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, California Association of Sanitation Agencies, California League of Cities, California Municipal Utilities Association, California-Nevada American Water Works Association, California Water Service Group, California Rural Water Association, Clean Water Action, Community Water Center, Latino Caucus of California Counties, Natural Resources Defense Council, PolicyLink, Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Water Agency Leaders Alliance, Water Environment Federation, and the Western Urban Water Coalition. A full list of endorsing organizations is attached.

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