

MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
April 7-10, 2025

LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHWAP)

ISSUE: Established by Congress in 2020 as an emergency measure, the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) has provided critical support to financially burdened households struggling to maintain essential water services during COVID-19. However, the need for assistance extends far beyond the pandemic. To protect public health and ensure long-term water affordability, Congress must establish a permanent, federally funded water assistance program.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges Congress to reintroduce and support legislation that would reauthorize a permanent Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program to ensure long-term access to affordable water for low-income households in Riverside County.

BACKGROUND: Water is a fundamental human right, yet millions of low-income households in the United States, including residents in Riverside County, struggle to afford this necessity. While the impact of the pandemic has receded, the need for a federal assistance program remains.

As water rates continue to rise due to inflation and other pressures, affordability is a significant challenge for many low-income households across Riverside County. To assist those Americans most impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress created the first ever national LIHWAP program to help struggling households reduce arrearages and keep up with future water bills. Through two COVID relief measures, Congress provided the program with more than \$1.1 billion.

LIHWAP was modeled after U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which has been providing states, tribes, and territories with federal funding for needs-based heating and cooling bill assistance since its creation in 1981. LIHWAP is administered by the HHS at the federal level, by Community Services Department (CSD) within California, and by Community Action Partnership (CAP) in Riverside County. LIHWAP aims to ensure that no family must choose between paying their water bill and meeting other basic needs. Through LIHWAP, eligible households receive assistance with water and wastewater bills, helping to alleviate financial burdens and prevent water shutoffs.

With support of Community Action Partnership, the local LIHWAP administrator, Riverside County, utilized the program effectively and more extensively for the benefit of ratepayers than any other county in California. Nationwide, HHS has reported more than one million households have been aided by the program through 2023.

Key Benefits of LIHWAP:

1. **Ensuring Access to Clean Water:** LIHWAP plays a critical role in ensuring that low-income households have access to clean and safe water. By providing financial assistance, LIHWAP helps prevent water shutoffs and ensures that families can maintain access to essential water services for drinking, cooking, and sanitation.
2. **Protecting Public Health:** Access to clean water is essential for maintaining public health and preventing the spread of diseases. LIHWAP helps protect the health and well-being of low-income individuals and families by ensuring they have access to reliable water and wastewater services.
3. **Alleviating Financial Hardship:** For many low-income households, water bills represent a significant portion of their monthly expenses. LIHWAP provides much-needed financial relief by offsetting the cost of water and wastewater services.

During the 118th Congress (2023-2024), California Senator Alex Padilla took the lead on introducing S. 3830, which would have codified the LIHWAP program beyond the funds running out from COVID-19 pandemic. While the legislation did not receive a hearing, the Monday Morning Group is supportive of the reintroduction of the legislation and advocates for the eventual signing of LIHWAP into law.