



Climate Change

Ensuring safe and affordable drinking water for all
[SB 200 \(Monning\)](#) [AB 217 \(Garcia\)](#) [AB 134 \(Bloom\)](#)

Background

Access to safe and affordable drinking water is a right for every American, regardless of income or zip code. Over one million Californians do not have ongoing access to safe and reliable water each year, especially in the Central Valley's corridor of smaller, mostly Latino, mostly low-income towns. While larger cities have the revenue to modernize and build to capacity for their residents, smaller poorer towns and regions do not. California community water systems must charge fees that are affordable and sufficient to cover all of the costs required to comply with state and federal drinking water standards. However, many community systems cannot meet this goal because of low income levels of communities, high treatment costs, and the continued challenges of drought and climate change. Additional money must be appropriated to help these water systems continue to charge affordable rates while ensuring safe drinking water.

Legislative Summary

This package of bills will establish a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund under the control of the state Water Resources Control Board, with funding mechanisms and levels still to be determined. Governor Newsom has kickstarted this effort with \$25 million in his proposed budget and declared this a priority in his State of the State address.

AB 217 would establish a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in the State Treasury. It also lays out the specific details of the Funds construction and how money is appropriated into the account. Specifically, it allows the State Water Resources Control Board to accept federal contributions, voluntary contributions, gifts, grants, and bequests. The board can spend money through grants, loans, contracts and services, provided it meets the guidelines. Up to 20 percent of the fund can be distributed to drinking water regional offices "in an

unspecified manner.” The fund, which will be interest bearing, must have \$3 billion in it by 2023 and 100 million dollars per year in interest revenue. Additionally, the bill requires the legislature to appropriate \$200 million per year for five years into the fund.

The bill lays out certain fees for this fund. It requires that producers of fertilizing material pay a fee of .006 center per 1 dollar of sales, handlers of milk and dairy products will pay a fee of \$.01355 per hundredweight of milk, owners of nondairy confined animal facilities will pay \$1,000 fee annually for their first facility and \$750 for additional facilities, up to \$12,000. Up to 2% of the fund may be used for administrative fees by 2022 and 4% before then.

The legislation also lists out what kinds of projects the fund can be spent on, including replacement water; replacing, blending, and treating water; fixing pipes, systems, or fixtures; operations and maintenance costs; consolidating systems; repaying debts of public water systems; testing water; and wastewater treatment plant operations and maintenance.

SB 200 (Monning) is the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. This bill would create a similar fund as described above but differs from AB 217 in the following ways:

- It would require the creation of a map of aquifers that would be used as a source of drinking water that are at a high risk of containing contaminants and a map of residential areas that are at risk of having contaminated drinking water.
- It does not lay out the schedule of fees or amount spent by the fund.
- It contains a narrower lists of projects that the fund can be spent on.
- It allows for 5% of the fund to be used on administrative costs.

AB 134 would require that if a Safe Drinking Water Fund or Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund is established, it must be part of the Governor’s budget. This bill would also require an analysis of the effectiveness of the funds every five years.

Jewish Values

The Talmudic concept of *bal tashchit*, "do not destroy," was developed by the rabbis into a universal doctrine that dramatically asserted God’s ownership of the land. Psalm 24 notes, "The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof." From this basic concept, it follows that any act of destruction is an offense against the

property of God. Additionally, when God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: Take care not to spoil or destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you. (Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13). This teaching reminds us that ultimately, the Earth belongs to God and it is our job to be protectors of all of God's creations.

Water in particular has also always been an important part of the Jewish relationship with God. In Isaiah 41:17-18, God promises: "I will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water." We are inspired by the notion that water is among God's gifts to humanity, and we must work to preserve and protect that which sustains us.