

**Fletcher Cole's speech to the State Water Board 6/28/17
regarding the insufficiency of the proposed scenarios**

Good afternoon. My name is Fletcher Cole. I am a software programmer and live in Oakland. I am speaking to you today as a volunteer advocate with the Service Workers Project for Affordable Water and Utilities, or SWPAWU. I am responding to questions 1 and 3 from the Summer 2017 Topics for Comment. The scenarios that have been put forth are insufficient due to the following:

1) They only address a discount structure and do not consider any abatement, elimination or forgiveness of retroactive, current or future fines and penalties. The fines and penalties levied by Water Companies and Districts like EBMUD are a huge and a crippling factor in our low-income families' ability to pay their water bills. EBMUD alone shut off 9,000 families water last year alone primarily for these reasons! This is with their CAP assistance program!

For example, we recently worked with a family of 8 whose water had been shut off for 3 months. Their total bill was over \$3000 even though their actual water usage was only \$700. The remaining \$2300 were a result of deposits, fines, water theft penalties and other fees. After 15+ hours on the phone, we were able to establish a payment plan with EBMUD, but NO fees or penalties were waived.

2) Water companies and utility districts' keep raising water rates, making the proposed 20 – 35% assistance from the potential LIRA program negligible. For example, EBMUD raised utility rates by about 20% in 2013 and are proposing to raise them again by another 18.5% over the next two years. These are the highest rate increases in the history of EBMUD and combined make keeping up with paying water bills impossible. If water districts need more funds for infrastructure they should not balance their budgets on those least able to pay them.

3) California now has the highest rate of poverty in the country. Minimum wage in California is \$10. Wages have largely stagnated or even decreased for the vast majority of the working poor. In Oakland the medium rent for a two-bedroom apartment is over \$3,000. Low-income families are already having to choose between paying for rent and paying for water.

To address these issues: we demand that the State Water Board install a permanent moratorium on disconnection of water service; eliminate all fees and fines, disconnect and reconnect fees, deposits, water theft fees; and forgive all past water debt for families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.