



# Media Release

## **California distributed \$880 million to clear unpaid water and wastewater bills for 4 million people**

***Water Board and CalEPA join Los Angeles leaders to celebrate success of state's water debt relief program***

June 12, 2024

Contact: [Dimitri Stanich](#), Information Officer

**LOS ANGELES** – The State Water Resources Control Board and California Environmental Protection Agency today joined Los Angeles city officials to highlight results from the state's [Water and Wastewater Arrearages Payment Program](#), which distributed over \$880 million to clear water and wastewater bills of over 1.3 million households and businesses — or 4 million people — financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The arrearages program began in 2021, after Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Legislature authorized allocating \$1 billion in federal funding from the Biden-Harris Administration's COVID-19 stimulus package, the "[American Rescue Plan](#)," to provide relief from household and commercial water and wastewater debt. This action followed Gov. Newsom's April 2020 [executive order](#) prohibiting water suppliers from shutting off service to California households and businesses with unpaid bills.

"The Governor's swift action in the early days of the pandemic kept taps on for millions of struggling Californians," said Yana Garcia, California Secretary for Environmental Protection. "The extension of the moratorium on water shutoffs and the distribution of critical funding to water systems to forgive debt helped about 4 million Californians get back on their feet."

The arrearages program [initially covered](#) only water bill debt accrued between March 2020 and June 2021, but then [expanded](#) to cover wastewater debt from the same period. This year, the program [restarted](#) to extend eligibility for both water and wastewater debt by 18 months (through December 2022), and it covered 100% of eligible debt that water and wastewater systems applied to receive. The latest round of funding went out this spring; the program disbursed \$445 million to systems, which are now in the process of crediting their customers' bills.



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 • Mailing Address: P.O. Box 100, Sacramento, CA 95812-0100 • [www.waterboards.ca.gov](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov)



“All levels of government demonstrated decisive and cooperative action during California’s COVID-19 response to protect people during a crisis and hasten their recovery from it,” said E. Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. “I’m proud of the role the board played in this incredible effort by mobilizing a major program and providing the first wave of debt relief within months. And I’m even more proud of our partners at the local level — including cities, water and wastewater systems — who chose to participate in the program and help their customers. They brought this relief directly to those who need it.”

Water and wastewater systems that participated in the program agreed to forgo late fees and claim only allowed administrative costs, among other requirements. Overall, 944 community water systems, collectively serving 96% of the state’s population, participated in the program. The state disbursed approximately \$606 million to water systems and \$274 million to wastewater systems.

The City of Los Angeles received nearly 30% of these funds to help the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and Los Angeles City Sanitation (LASAN) clear the water and wastewater bills of more than 204,000 customers to date.

“Today’s announcement providing relief to thousands continues Los Angeles’s commitment to having our community’s back in the continued recovery from the pandemic,” said Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. “We continue to be committed to working with our federal, state and local partners through our locked arms approach to help our residents have access to critical resources. I am proud to stand with our CEO and Chief Engineer Janisse Quiñones, Councilwoman Hutt and partners from the state and community organizations to take action for LADWP customers in Los Angeles.”

“The State’s support for our customers has been a lifeline for them,” said LADWP CEO and Chief Engineer Janisse Quiñones. “Over the past four years we have provided more than \$700 million in utility assistance funds, including \$253 million in funding from the arrearages program, but we know that financial recovery from the pandemic continues for many in our city. We want our customers to know that LADWP cares, and we are here to help them get caught up on their LADWP bill and better manage their electric and water use.”

[More information](#) about the arrearages program can be found on the board’s website.

*The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.*