



# Media Release

## **Since launch of landmark state program, 900,000 more Californians have access to safe, affordable drinking water**

***Since 2019, State Water Board has distributed over \$1 billion in grants for drinking water projects in disadvantaged communities***

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**PORTERVILLE** – Five years after its launch, the state of California’s landmark [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program has made significant progress in advancing the human right to water.

In the five years since the program was established, the State Water Resources Control Board has distributed **more than \$1 billion in grants** to disadvantaged communities – over two-and-a-half times the amount of grants provided during the five years prior. During this time, the number of people served by failing water systems has fallen from 1.6 million to 700,000 – a net gain of **900,000 more Californians who now have safe and affordable drinking water.**

“When I took office, 1.6 million people didn’t have access to clean drinking water. We’re halfway through our SAFER program, and more than half of those people now have safe drinking water in their homes and schools,” said **California Gov. Gavin Newsom**. “Connecting 900,000 people to water is a huge success, but we won’t let up until every single Californian gets access to this essential resource.”

In 2019, during his first week in office, Newsom highlighted the need for better drinking water solutions and proposed creating a dedicated funding source for drinking water projects in disadvantaged communities. That same year, the Governor signed legislation to establish the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. The SAFER program, run by the State Water Board, is designed to not only fund projects, but to partner with communities to deliver sustainable infrastructure solutions that ensure access to clean drinking water for decades to come.

“The SAFER Program is delivering transformational change to communities like Porterville experiencing failing infrastructure intensified by impacts from climate change,” said **Yana Garcia, California Secretary for Environmental Protection**. “California was the first state in the nation to recognize the human right to water. Today,



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we are on our way toward making that right a reality across the state. When we partner with water systems, communities, and local leaders, we see results.”

This morning, the State Water Board and the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) joined a host of partners, including the City of Porterville, elected officials, [advisory group](#) members, community-based organizations and community members, at Porterville City Hall to share and celebrate the past five years of the program’s achievements. The City of Porterville, which is in Tulare County, exemplifies the experience of many small, rural towns that must contend with failing infrastructure amid extreme weather and climate change.

For several years now, Porterville, in partnership with the state, has led local efforts to expand access to safe drinking water by consolidating neighboring water systems into its own single system by merging infrastructure and managerial know-how to bring about sustainable solutions for safe drinking water.

Since 2019, the SAFER program has provided over \$15 million to Porterville, with an additional \$5.5 million grant in process, for six consolidations benefiting over 900 people. Three of those consolidations have been completed. Statewide, there have been 142 consolidations benefiting over 100,000 people since 2019.

“The City of Porterville is one of many water system partners that has led the state’s progress in recent years toward realizing the Human Right to Water by embracing consolidations,” said **E. Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board**. “Now five years into the SAFER program, we can rely on established relationships with partners like Porterville and leverage the lessons we have learned to bring about sustainable drinking water solutions faster, especially in those communities that have struggled the longest and where there is robust cooperation.”

The city has two more consolidations underway and has received \$8.1 million through SAFER’s [Expedited Drinking Water Grants](#) program last October for these projects, which are expected to be completed in 2026.

“The State’s support for the City’s drinking water projects has always been strong, but over the past five years, it has become more streamlined and effective thanks to the development of the Water Board’s SAFER program. This program has provided a solid foundation of expertise, public engagement, funding, and partnership,” said **Michael Knight, Assistant City Manager for the City of Porterville**. “As a result, the program has dramatically improved our ability to connect under-served and lower-income residents with safe drinking water, ensuring a healthier future for our community.”

To continue accelerating sustainable drinking water solutions like those in Porterville into the future, the State Water Board is considering the adoption of three goals for the SAFER program in its [Fund Expenditure Plan](#) this year, concentrating its financial assistance and technical support on key priorities. The proposed goals direct the

program to focus on finding solutions for water systems that have been [failing](#) since July 2019; securing sustainable solutions for all failing systems within five years on average; and completing an additional 130 consolidations by 2030, among other numeric targets. Broadly, the goals seek to ensure people in communities that do not have safe drinking water receive it; that all communities without safe drinking water are on track to get lasting solutions in place as swiftly as possible; and that California's most vulnerable communities transition to be resilient and prevent cycles of failure.

More information about the SAFER program, including the [SAFER dashboard](#) and [2024 Needs Assessment report](#), can be found on the State Water Board's [website](#).

View the [storymap on five years of SAFER](#).

*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.*



The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities.