



Senator Angelique V. Ashby, 8th Senate District

SB 1110 – Maintaining Cost Efficiency in Water Standards

Provides the Water Board enforcement flexibility

SUMMARY

SB 1110 provides the Water Board the flexibility to consider lower cost alternatives to water efficiency projects, if the projects maintain California’s high water efficiency and environmental standards and requirements.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Legislature passed SB 7x7 (Steinberg) requiring public urban water agencies to reduce water use by 20% by 2020. In 2018, SB 606 (Hertzberg) and AB 1668 (Friedman) established a framework for water efficiency requirements beyond 2020. The process outlined in these bills required both the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the Water Board to develop and enforce individualized “water use objectives” for each public urban water agency.

The Water Board is currently in the process of establishing these water efficiency regulations and is expected to complete them by summer of 2024. However, the Water Board found that the regulations, as currently drafted, would cost \$13.5 billion to implement and will only save about 1-2% of statewide water use.

THE PROBLEM

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) and the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) have reviewed the draft Water Board regulations and raised concerns with both the cost effectiveness of the regulations and the impacts they will have on low-income households.

Specifically, the LAO said that the regulations would have “disproportionate impacts on lower-income Californians.” And along these same lines, the PPIC said, “The communities with the most low-income residents would pay 2.5 times more than those with the fewest.”

Without SB 1110, the Water Board will be limited in its ability to consider high costs or unequal impacts to already disenfranchised communities, and will

leave them with little to no flexibility to approve lower-cost alternatives.

In many regions, disadvantaged communities face disproportionate challenges in accessing affordable water infrastructure, leading to health hazards and economic burdens. Lower cost water projects often play a crucial role in addressing environmental justice concerns by providing access to affordable, clean, and safe water for marginalized communities.

THE SOLUTION

SB 1110 allows the Water Board’s enforcement process to strike an appropriate balance between advancing water efficiency and guarding against disproportionate impacts and expenses that are not cost effective.

Allowing the Water Board to consider lower cost water projects not only addresses immediate water needs, but also promotes equity and environmental justice by ensuring that all individuals, especially those in disadvantaged communities, have equal access to this fundamental resource.

Importantly, the bill does not change the regulatory process in which the Water Board is currently engaged in, but instead provides flexibility to exercise discretion at the enforcement stage.

SB 1110 maintains water efficiency as a priority, does not alter the current regulatory process, and enables the Water Board to prevent disparate impacts when enforcing water efficiency regulations.

SUPPORT

- Regional Water Authority (sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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