



Governor John Bel Edwards
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70004

May 14, 2020

Via Electronic Mail

Dear Governor John Bel Edwards,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we strongly urge you to take swift action to halt all water shutoffs and ensure water access for Louisiana's residents during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The pandemic is resulting in the widespread loss of wages and jobs across the country and will disproportionately cause extreme economic distress for low-income families.

On April 24, Louisiana ranked 5th in COVID-19 cases and 4th highest per capita in the United States. Water shutoffs disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color with the highest rates in the South. Governor Edwards, you said during a press conference, "We have more chronic health conditions per capita in Louisiana than most states." As you know, this is coupled with our extremely high poverty and unemployment rates. Without access to water, thousands of vulnerable Louisiana residents could contract and die from the coronavirus. Currently, Orleans Parish is the hardest hit by COVID-19 with 6,753 cases and 481 deaths as of May 13th, 2020. These same residents have the highest water burdens in Louisiana with water utility bills topping 9% of individual incomes for every 1 out of 5 residents. This is reflected in the already 25,465 delinquencies and 5,707 disconnections reported in the Sewerage and Water Board February Finance and Administration Committee meeting. This puts Orleans Parish and surrounding parishes at considerable risk for water shutoffs, impacting individual safety and stressing public health sectors across the state.

Water is a human right and a basic necessity. Access to safe, affordable water is even more crucial right now because of this pandemic. The Center for Disease Control's top recommendation to help stop the spread of disease is thorough and frequent hand-washing, but without access to clean water, people cannot follow this simple — yet crucial — advice. Households that have their water shut off will be even more vulnerable to the rampant spread of the coronavirus and the resulting economic hardships — which endangers their health and our communities.

We appreciate the Louisiana Public Service Commission's order which declared a moratorium for all regulated water utilities. However, this order only protects those who are serviced by a private water company. This order, along with the voluntary orders from Baker, Baton Rouge, Jefferson Parish, Marksville, Monroe, New Orleans and Shreveport cover only approximately 2.7 million people, and many of them are expiring in the coming weeks. We need action from your office to ensure that all 4.65 million people living in Louisiana are protected from the threat of water shutoffs.



We urge you and your administration to act now to:

- Order a statewide moratorium on water shutoffs for nonpayment for all public and private systems,
- Require immediate restoration of water service to all homes previously disconnected for nonpayment,
- Waive all late fees, penalties, service restoration fees, and water rate increases during and for 180 days following the end of the emergency.
- Alleviate cost burdens, and help water utilities recoup cost, by creating a comprehensive Arrearage Management Program (AMP) statewide for at least 12 months. (An AMP is a financial assistance program for low-income customers with overdue bills using leveled payments and some fee forgiveness.),
- Advocate for funds through a federal program for water utilities that would mirror the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to cover additional operating costs and lost revenue for backed wages, employee training or overtime related to new programmings needed for an AMP and other infrastructure improvements that are urgently needed within the next 12 months.

The pandemic is making it all the more clear: Public health depends on universal water access. We need running water at home to keep ourselves and our communities safe. Water must be turned on for everyone, right now, for the safety of all Louisiana residents, and the entire country.

Sincerely,

350 New Orleans
 A Community Voice - Louisiana
 Adaptation Institute
 Beloved Community
 Bike Easy
 Black Magic Music Group,
 LLC.Broad Community Connections
 Brooks-Shaw Temple and Peoples UMCs
 Center for Hope Children and Family Services
 Coastal Communities Consulting
 Committee For A Better New Orleans
 CSED
 Culinaria Center for Food Law, Policy, and Culture
 ECCO Community Center
 El Centro Inc
 European Dissent
 Extinction Rebellion NOLA
 Familias Unidas en Accion
 First Grace Community Alliance
 FitLot
 Friends of Lafitte Greenway
 Fronrunner Resources LLC
 Gary Watson Media
 Gert Town Community Development Center
 Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi Chitimacha Choctaw
 Greater Tremé Consortium Inc
 Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance
 Groundwork New Orleans
 Grow Dat Youth Farm
 Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy
 HDLG Services, LLC
 Healthy Community Services
 Heart N Hands, Inc.
 HousingNOLA

Jambalaya News Louisiana
 Justice & Beyond
 LifeCity
 L3C
 Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
 Louisiana Public Health Institute
 Lower 9 Community Wellness Consortium
 Research Project
 NOLAVATE Black
 Nouvelle Services
 New Orleans Habitat for Humanity
 New Orleans Renters Rights Assembly
 New Orleans Youth Alliance
 No Waste Louisiana
 NOLA Heat & Me - Community
 PACE Group LLC
 PBDC Ad Agency
 Peace by Piece New Orleans
 Project Possible
 Propeller
 REMIXecology
 Ride New Orleans
 SOUL
 SPROUT
 The New Orleans Democratic Socialists of America
 The Water Collaborative
 Tierra Foundation
 Tierra Resources
 Top Hat Tech LLC
 Ubuntu Construction Co
 VAYLA New Orleans
 Waning Moon Weddings & Ceremonies
 Water Wise Gulf South
 25 Private Citizens