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

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.

May 14, 2020

The Water Collaborative  
1433 North Claiborne Ave. New Orleans LA 70116  
jessica@nolawater.org
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 levelized 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
Culinaaria Center for Food Law, Policy, and Culture
ECO Community Center
El Centro Inc
European Dissent
Extinction Rebellion NOLA
Familias Unidas en Accion
First Grace Community Alliance
FitLot
Friends of Lafitte Greenway
Frontrunner Resources LLC
Gary Watson Media
Gert Town Community Development Center
Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi Chitimacha Choctaw
Greater Treme 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