Senate Bill 552
Drought Resilient Communities Act
Introduced on February 18, 2021

SUMMARY
SB 552 improves drought preparedness for small and rural communities by making various changes to local drought and water shortage contingency plans and by enhancing coordination between local and state governments, small water suppliers, and rural communities.

ISSUE
California experienced the worst drought on record from 2012 to 2016, estimated to be the driest four-year period in the last 450 years. The severity was unprecedented and significantly impacted the environment, agricultural water supplies, and urban water supplies. Over 480,000 people relying on public water systems were affected – many households relying on domestic wells were left without running water for extended periods of time. Low-income, small and rural communities were struck particularly hard – more than 75% of the drought-impacted public water systems were small, serving 1,000 connections or fewer.

Even as the historic drought lifted in 2017, it served as an alarming indicator of California’s warmer future. 2020 was one of the driest years on record and 85% of California is currently facing moderate drought conditions. Climate models predict that droughts will only continue to increase in severity and frequency. In an effort to build a more drought-resilient future, the Legislature approved SB 606 (Hertzberg, 2018) and AB 1668 (Friedman, 2018) which made significant improvements to drought planning for urban water suppliers. A parallel framework is needed for small and rural water systems.

There are currently varying levels of water contingency planning and coverage across counties for small water suppliers and self-supplied communities. The disproportionate impact on these communities will put hundreds of thousands of people at risk of going without running water during the next drought. Access to water is a human right and California must ensure communities are equipped with the necessary tools to prepare for future droughts.

SB 552 (Hertzberg)
SB 552 (Hertzberg) protects vulnerable communities and small water suppliers from drought by improving local planning, increasing data collection, updating emergency responses, and improving statewide coordination. These tools are critical for communities most at risk and will help prevent catastrophic water shortages for areas most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

SUPPORT
California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)
Community Water Center

Staff contact: Tammy Trinh: 916-651-4018 or Tammy.Trinh@sen.ca.gov
1 – Updated 2/18/2021