

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY  
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC  
APRIL 9 – 11, 2024**

**SUPPORTING WATER AFFORDABILITY**

**ISSUE:** Access to clean water is a fundamental human right, yet millions of low-income households in the United States, including residents in Riverside County, struggle to afford this basic necessity. The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) was established by Congress in 2020 on an emergency basis to help financially burdened households maintain essential water services during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the impacts of the pandemic have receded, the need for this critical federal assistance program remains. To address this, Congress should enact legislation to establish a permanent, national low-income household assistance program.

**ACTION:** Support Senator Padilla’s legislation, the LIHWAP Establishment Act, which would authorize a permanent nationwide LIHWAP program modeled after the successful program Congress created during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**BACKGROUND:** As water rates continue to rise due to inflation and other pressures, affordability is a significant challenge for many low-income households across Riverside County. To assist those Americans most impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress created the first ever national LIHWAP program to help struggling households reduce arrearages and keep pace with future water bills. Through two COVID-19 relief measures, Congress provided the program with more than \$1.1 billion.

LIHWAP was modeled after U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which has been providing states, tribes, and territories with federal funding for needs-based heating and cooling bill assistance since its creation in 1981. LIHWAP is administered by the HHS at the federal level, by Community Services Department (CSD) within California, and by Community Action Partnership (CAP) in Riverside County. LIHWAP aims to ensure that no family must face difficulty choosing between paying their water bill and meeting other necessities. Through LIHWAP, eligible households receive assistance with water and wastewater bills, helping to alleviate financial burdens and prevent water shutoffs.

Due to the excellent work of Community Action Partnership, our local LIHWAP administrator, Riverside County utilized the program for effectively, and more extensively benefit of ratepayers, than any other county in California. Nationwide, HHS has reported that more than one million households were supported by the program in 2023.

**Key Benefits of LIHWAP:**

1. **Ensuring Access to Clean Water:** LIHWAP plays a critical role in ensuring that low-income households have access to clean and safe water. By providing financial assistance, LIHWAP helps prevent water shutoffs and ensures that families can maintain access to essential water services for drinking, cooking, and sanitation.
2. **Protecting Public Health:** Access to clean water is essential for maintaining public health and preventing the spread of diseases. LIHWAP helps protect the health and well-being of low-income individuals and families by ensuring they have access to reliable water and wastewater services.
3. **Alleviating Financial Hardship:** For many low-income households, water bills represent a significant portion of their monthly expenses. LIHWAP provides much-needed financial relief by offsetting the cost of water and wastewater services.

LIHWAP plays a crucial role in addressing the urgent issue of water affordability and ensuring access to clean water for low-income households. By providing financial assistance to those in need, LIHWAP helps protect public health, alleviate financial hardship, and promote equity and social justice.