



San Bernardino County

Legislation Text

File #: 6207, Agenda Item #: 88

REPORT/RECOMMENDATION TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF BOARD GOVERNED COUNTY SERVICE AREAS AND RECORD OF ACTION

June 14, 2022

FROM

BRENDON BIGGS, Director, Department of Public Works - Special Districts

SUBJECT

Low Income Household Water Assistance Program Enrollment Application

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Acting as the governing body of County Service Area 42 - Oro Grande, County Service Area 64 - Spring Valley Lake, County Service Area 70 CG - Cedar Glen, County Service Area 70F Little Morongo, County Service Area 70J - Oak Hills, County Service Area 70 W-3 - Hacienda Heights, and County Service Area 70 W-4 - Pioneertown:

1. Authorize the submission of the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program application to the California Department of Community Services and Development.
2. Authorize the Director or Assistant Director of the Department of Public Works to sign and submit the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program application and any other necessary documents, subject to review by County Counsel.
3. Direct the Director or Assistant Director of the Department of Public Works to transmit all documents in relation to the Low-Income Water Assistance Program application to the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors within 30 days of execution.

(Presenter: Brendon Biggs, Director, 387-7906)

COUNTY AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Operate in a Fiscally-Responsible and Business-Like Manner.

Pursue County Goals and Objectives by Working with Other Agencies and Stakeholders.

Focus on Recovery and Resiliency Following Major Emergency Responses such as the December 2, 2015 Terrorist Attack (SB Strong) and the Global COVID-19 Pandemic.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Approval of this item will not result in the use of Discretionary General Funding (Net County Cost). If the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) application is approved, County Service Area (CSA) water systems will be enrolled in LIHWAP and participate in the direct payment service established by the Direct Payment Program via the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) third-party disbursement partner, HORNE LLP (HORNE). CSA water system customers can apply directly to HORNE and, if deemed eligible, LIHWAP funds will be transferred to the Department of Public Works - Special Districts (Department) to credit customer accounts. LIHWAP does not require any local matching funds.

The Department does not collect the necessary customer data to determine who may be eligible for the

program. Based on the outstanding receivables for residential water accounts and the poverty rate in the high desert, the estimated amount of revenue the Department should be eligible to receive is approximately \$170,000. However, individual customers will need to initiate the assistance process, therefore the amount may be less.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In December 2020, the American Rescue Plan established the LIHWAP, a federal assistance program to help low-income households pay down their outstanding water bills. The State of California has been allocated \$116 million in one-time funding to provide LIHWAP assistance. CSD has been designated the administering agency for LIHWAP in California, to provide financial assistance to help low-income Californians manage their residential water utility costs.

CSD has contracted with HORNE to disburse direct payments to water systems for a LIHWAP credit to households identified as eligible for assistance. HORNE is responsible for local administration of the LIHWAP, conducting outreach and promoting program awareness to low-income households, conducting eligibility determination, and responding to and resolving customer complaints. Low-income households may apply for services directly through HORNE in their service area.

Water systems must enroll in LIHWAP and complete a Direct Payment Agreement to receive disbursements and apply the credit to customer accounts. Once enrolled, the Department will be responsible for accepting the LIHWAP payment on behalf of the household, confirming benefits have been credited to the customer accounts, confirming that services have been restored or disconnection prevented, assisting with promoting the program to customers, and notifying the customer that the LIHWAP benefit has been applied to their account.

LIHWAP has begun accepting applications from eligible households in May 2022, and will operate through August 31, 2023. LIHWAP will begin disbursing funds to the Department once the application is submitted and approved. Along with adding the LIHWAP information to the Department's website, HORNE has begun conducting public outreach, promoting program awareness to low-income households, and conducting eligibility determinations.

PROCUREMENT

Not applicable.

REVIEW BY OTHERS

This item has been reviewed by County Counsel (Aaron Gest, Deputy County Counsel, 387-4322) on May 20, 2022; Finance (Tom Forster, Administrative Analyst, 387-4635) on May 25, 2022; and County Finance and Administration (Paloma Hernandez-Barker, Deputy Executive Officer, 387-5423) on May 30, 2022.