



September 15, 2026

Eric Oppenheimer
Executive Director
State Water Resources Control Board
1111 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Pending Decision for Deputy Director, Division of Drinking Water position

Dear Mr. Oppenheimer,

The undersigned organizations appreciate our ongoing collaboration with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board). Our organizations have a long history of engagement with the State Board and the Division of Drinking Water (DDW) on drinking water regulations, policies, funding, and other matters affecting the water agencies and communities we represent. Board members and staff are consistently willing to listen and consider issues we bring to the table as the regulated community, and that is why we write to you today. Among the critical matters in front of the Board and Executive team is the selection of the next DDW Deputy Director.

The Board was fortunate to have Darrin Polhemus as Deputy Director for ten years. During that time, he guided DDW and the drinking water purveyor community through a pandemic and related public concerns about drinking water safety, and was responsible for several initiatives including implementing new programs that seek to stabilize and restore drinking water service in disadvantaged communities, such as the Senate Bill 200 Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program. As we take this moment to recognize the significant legacy of Mr. Polhemus' tenure at DDW, we also wish to acknowledge the important decision before the Board in selecting the new Deputy Director. The selection of his successor comes at an important time for California's drinking water community, and we would like to share our perspective on the qualities and considerations we believe will be important in selecting this position.

Collectively, our organizations represent California drinking water providers ranging from the largest agencies to its smallest community water systems. Through our work with the State Board, we have seen firsthand how decisions made by DDW affect the ability of water providers to remain protective of public health, maintain and improve infrastructure, respond to emerging contaminants, manage increasingly complex regulatory requirements, and provide safe and affordable drinking water to their communities.

The significance of the Deputy Director's role in this work is hard to overstate. DDW regulates public water systems, oversees water recycling projects, permits water treatment devices, supports water system security, and performs numerous other functions.¹ DDW's Field Operations Branches enforce the federal and California Safe Drinking Water Acts and oversee approximately 7,500 public water systems.² Among other responsibilities,³ DDW develops and implements drinking water regulations, policies, and guidelines to ensure Californians have access to safe, adequate, and affordable drinking water. This includes establishing detection limits for reporting purposes (DLRs), notification and response levels, and primary and secondary maximum contaminant levels (MCLs), such as the recently adopted MCL for hexavalent chromium and the anticipated MCLs for PFAS.

Alan Roberson, former Executive Director for the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators observes: "the new Deputy Director must have the confidence and credibility to defend the current safety of California's drinking water in a manner that gains the public's trust and the respect of scientists, fellow regulators, and legislators to help focus the conversation on what actions are truly necessary to ensure the success of California's Safe Drinking Water Act for the next 50 years." We agree. In an age of persistent misinformation and information overload, the DDW Deputy Director will need to focus public discourse on the science-based, data-driven regulation of contaminants that pose demonstrated risks to human health. This will allow the State Board to direct its limited resources to long-term public health protection by financing new and improved technology and infrastructure that will assist drinking water systems in providing clean, safe, and affordable drinking water to Californians for generations to come.

¹ See State Board, Information for Public Drinking Water Systems, available at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/publicwatersystems.html.

² See State Board, Drinking Water Program, Field Operations Branch, available at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/programs/.

³ The delegated responsibilities of the DDW Deputy Director are outlined in the California Safe Drinking Water Act. See Cal. Health & Saf. Code, § 116271(k).

As stated directly in a separate commentary by Dr. Roy L. Wolfe, former chair of the Water Research Foundation, “The person who replaces Darrin Polhemus ... will have a major role in deciding ... which risks deserve immediate attention, where regulatory resources should be focused, and how the state responds when public health goals run up against aging infrastructure, limited resources, and the cost of new requirements.”⁴ Strong leadership skills, the capacity for independent and critical thinking, clear communication abilities, financial acumen, technical competence, and, as required by the California Safe Drinking Water Act, “public health expertise” are among the essential qualifications that a DDW Deputy Director should possess to meet this challenge. We concur with Dr. Wolfe’s conclusion that: “California needs a drinking water leader who can look at the entire system rather than focus on one problem at a time. That means knowing when a public health threat requires immediate action but also being willing to ask how strong the science is, what treatment can realistically accomplish, and what it will cost communities already struggling to maintain their systems.”

Given our role working with the future DDW Deputy Director and the significance of this position to the drinking water community, we felt compelled to respectfully offer our feedback as the Board and Executive team work to fill the position. Our purpose in offering these comments is to continue the constructive engagement our organizations have had with the State Board and to share the perspective of the drinking water providers that will work with the next Deputy Director to implement the state’s drinking water policies and priorities. We believe the strongest candidate will be one who can weigh all the evidence, engage constructively with the diverse water systems responsible for implementing the state’s drinking water requirements, balance the public health benefits of regulating new contaminants as well as, in Dr. Wolfe’s words, “protect the gains of the previous decades and focus the attention of varied stakeholders on the most important actions to ensure safe drinking water for all.”

We appreciate your consideration of our input on this very important process. We look forward to working with the new Deputy Director when they are selected and continuing our constructive relationship with the Division and the Board.

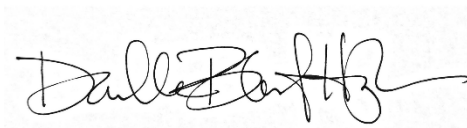
⁴ Capitol Weekly, August 31, 2026. “California’s next drinking water chief must get the balance right,” available at <https://capitolweekly.net/californias-next-drinking-water-chief-must-get-the-balance-right/>.

Mr. Eric Oppenheimer
September 15, 2026
Page 4

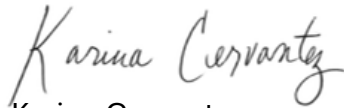
Sincerely,

Charley Wilson

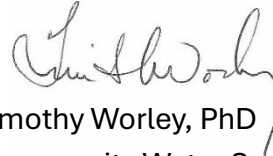
Charles Wilson
Southern California Water Coalition

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Danielle Blacet-Hyden
California Municipal Utilities Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karina Cervantez", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Karina Cervantez
California Association of Mutual Water
Companies

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy Worley", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Timothy Worley, PhD
Community Water Systems Alliance