



## **The health of our nation begins with clean water for all**

March 27, 2020

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, American Rivers and River Network recognize that access to clean water is vital to preventing the spread of the virus and protecting the people of our nation. The intersection of water and public health is more apparent than ever.

In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, health officials have advised individuals to adhere to [basic hygiene practices](#), like hand-washing, to protect themselves from contracting the virus. However, approximately one million Americans lack access to indoor plumbing and many millions more have had their water shut off for late or non-payment. These numbers disproportionately represent low-income and communities of color. [Tribal communities](#) and [undocumented immigrant communities](#) are disproportionately impacted, with limited access to clean, safe and affordable water. These and other communities without access to water remain at a distinct and dangerous disadvantage in the face of this global pandemic.

For this reason we call on Congress, for the duration of this public health emergency, to:

1. Ban involuntary water shutoffs nationwide;
2. Mandate safe restoration of water services for all without access;
3. Prioritize water infrastructure funding to communities most in need of critical water infrastructure investments; and
4. Increase and sustain water infrastructure funding in general for water systems to ensure safe and affordable water and sanitation for all Americans at all times.

We commend the many local and state governments that have already acted swiftly to ban water shutoffs and restore water to residents, recognizing water's power to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and its impact on public health. However, there are still communities that have not yet banned water shut offs, restored water, or appropriately communicated the necessary [precautions](#) to take when water is restored. Community-led frontline organizations have been and continue to be leading the movement for clean water for all in their communities. Action at the federal level is needed to support this

work and ensure all communities receive clean, safe and affordable water—regardless of race, class, immigration status or otherwise—during this unprecedented crisis.

While it is imperative to provide access to clean and affordable water for every person in the U.S. to combat this pandemic, the need for water as a basic human right far surpasses the threat of the coronavirus. Approximately, 13.8 million U.S. households (almost 12%) regularly face unaffordable water bills while water utilities struggle to fund maintenance or replacement of the aging infrastructure. As water rates grow increasingly unaffordable due to America's aging drinking water infrastructure, there should be a permanent ban on water shutoffs for residents who cannot afford the rising costs.

As we move past this crisis, water services should remain on for all households in perpetuity. Future policy reform should ensure equitable and affordable access to water services for all Americans as we transition from this emergency response to regular operations. Federal funding to support water utilities is critical to offset the cost of drinking water infrastructure maintenance and replacement. Funding should be prioritized in low-income communities and communities of color in order to ensure these communities don't bear the brunt of the expenses.

We at American Rivers and River Network hope that through this time of crisis, we begin building the just and equitable society we all wish to see, including access to clean, safe and affordable water for all.

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