

*Sent electronically on October 21, 2020*

Dr. Robert R. Redfield  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

October 21, 2020

## **Request for a Nationwide Water Shutoff Moratorium**

Dear Director Redfield:

On behalf of our members and supporters, we, the undersigned 121 organizations, call on you to take urgent action to stop water shutoffs nationwide to help protect people from Covid-19. We ask that you use your authority under Section 361 of the Public Health Services Act to impose a nationwide moratorium on water service disconnections for nonpayment during the Covid-19 pandemic with safe service restoration for all households previously disconnected.

Water is critical for disinfection and sanitation to control the spread of Covid-19. One of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's top recommendations to help stop the spread of disease is thorough and frequent handwashing, but without access to water, people cannot follow this simple — yet crucial — advice. Strikingly, research from We the People of Detroit identified a direct correlation between zip codes with highest rates of water shutoffs and the highest COVID-19 cases in Detroit, and found a substantial, statistically significant effect of water insecurity on psychological distress (see appendix).

Water shutoffs pose a real threat to human health. Right now, thousands of people could be living without running water in their homes; they do not have water to drink, bathe, clean and disinfect, wash their hands, or flush their toilets. Households that have their water shut off will be even more vulnerable to the rampant spread of the coronavirus endangering the health and safety of entire communities. Seniors, pregnant women, young children and people with diabetes and other illnesses are especially vulnerable.

As of October 1, less than half of the country was protected from water shutoffs by a state or local moratorium, as more than 180 local and state protections have expired. An estimated 177 million people are not protected under a local or state water shutoff moratorium, and hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of water shutoff across the country because they have fallen behind on their water bills (see appendix).

Now is the time to act to help prevent this deepening public health disaster by issuing a nationwide water shutoff moratorium.

Sincerely,

## **National**

Action Center on Race and the Economy  
American Rivers  
Campaign for Lead Free Water  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Corporate Accountability  
Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul  
Earthjustice  
Food & Water Action  
Friends of the Earth U.S.  
Greenpeace US  
Justice Action Mobilization Network  
Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice  
League of Conservation Voters  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc. (LDF)  
National Coalition for Legislation on Affordable Water  
National Welfare Rights Union  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Nuclear Information and Resource Service  
Oil Change International  
Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Progressive Democrats of America  
Public Citizen  
Recode.org  
River Network  
Sisters of Charity Federation  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team  
The Democracy Collaborative

## **Regional**

Alliance for the Great Lakes  
Citizens United for Renewable Energy (CURE)  
Earth Ethics, Inc.  
For Love of Water (FLOW)

Freshwater Future

Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation

Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, New Windsor, NY

Ursulines of the Roman Union - Eastern Province

We the People of Detroit

## **Alabama**

Alabama Arise

Cahaba River Society

Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust

SWEET Alabama

## **California**

Community Water Center

Lady Freethinker

MLK Coalition of Greater Los Angeles

North County Watch

Restore the Delta

Social Eco Education (SEE-LA)

## **Colorado**

San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council

## **Florida**

Nature Coast Conservation

## **Illinois**

Clean Power Lake County

Faith In Place Action Fund

Metropolitan Planning Council

Prairie Rivers Network

She Votes Illinois

## **Indiana**

Citizens Action Coalition of IN

**Iowa**

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement

Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness/Advocacy Network

**Louisiana**

350 New Orleans

**Maryland**

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Cleanwater Lingano Inc.

Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Prince George's County Peace & Justice Coalition

Public Justice Center

**Massachusetts**

Fore River Residents Against the Compressor Station

Old Stone Mill Center Zero Waste Maker Space

Take Back the Grid

**Michigan**

48217 Community and Environmental Health Organization

Detroit Jews for Justice

Detroit Metro United Church of Christ Social Justice Team

Flint Rising

James and Grace Lee Boggs Center

Michigan Coalition for Human Rights

Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

NMEAC

People's Water Board Coalition

The Original United Citizens of Southwest Detroit

Title Track

Water You Fighting For?

## **Minnesota**

Community Power  
Cooperative Energy Futures  
COPAL MN

## **New Jersey**

Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipeline - NJ  
Franciscan Response to Fossil Fuel  
Indivisible NJ5  
Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry NJ  
MoveOn.org Hoboken  
New Jersey Tenants Organization  
NJ State Industrial Union Council  
Occupy Bergen County  
People Demanding Action  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sussex County  
WATERSPIRIT

## **New Mexico**

Common Ground Community Trust  
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety  
New Energy Economy  
We Are One River

## **New York**

Center for Elder Law & Justice  
Church Women United in New York State  
Environmental Advocates of NY  
Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project  
Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement  
Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, Inc.  
Long Island Progressive Coalition  
Metro NY Catholic Climate Movement  
New York Communities for Change

New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)  
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)  
NYC H2O  
Partnership for the Public Good  
Save the Sound  
Seneca Lake Guardian  
Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion  
Western New York Law Center

### **North Carolina**

River Guardian Foundation

### **Oregon**

Portland Citizens for Lead-free Drinking Water  
Rogue Climate

### **Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, on behalf of our low income clients  
Water rights awareness of Pennsylvania

### **West Virginia**

Mountain State Justice, Inc.

### **Wisconsin**

Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Milwaukee Water Commons

## Appendix

### Research

- WLNS. [Detroit water shutoffs led to more COVID-19 Cases](#). July 9, 2020.
- Nadia Gaber, Andrew Silva, Monica Lewis-Patrick, Emily Kutil, Debra Taylor, Roslyn Bouier, [Water insecurity and psychosocial distress: case study of the Detroit water shutoffs](#). *Journal of Public Health*, October 2020; fdaa157; <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa157>
- Meehan, K, Jepson, W, Harris, LM, et al. [Exposing the myths of household water insecurity in the global north: A critical review](#). *WIREs Water*. 2020;e1486. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1486>
- Patel AI, Hecht CE, Cradock A, Edwards MA, Ritchie LD. Drinking Water in the United States: Implications of Water Safety, Access, and Consumption. *Annual Review of Nutrition*, Volume 40, pages 345-373, September 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-nutr-122319-035707>
- Montag, Coty. Thurgood Marshall Institute at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. ["Water/Color: A Study of Race and the Water Affordability Crisis in America's Cities."](#) June 2019.
- Food & Water Watch. ["America's Secret Water Crisis: National shutoff survey reveals water affordability emergency affecting millions."](#) October 2018.
- Warner, Mildred E., Xue Zhang and Marcela González Rivas 2020. "Which States and Cities Protect Residents from Water Disconnection in the COVID-19 Pandemic?" *Utilities Policy*, on line before print <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2020.101118>

### Water Shutoff Moratoria

- According to Food & Water Action's [live tracker of water shutoff moratoria](#):
  - As of October 1, 2020, 46 percent of the country – 151 million people – remains protected under a water shutoff moratorium. This is down from a high of two-thirds of the U.S. population that had been protected.
    - An estimated 177 million people are not protected under a local or state shutoff moratorium.
    - One in five people nationally have lost protections from water shutoffs because of expiring local and state moratoria — 63 million people have lost protections.
  - At least 182 moratoria, including nine comprehensive statewide orders, have expired.
  - Over the month of September alone, an additional 32 local and state moratoria expired, affecting 6.5 million people.
  - By November 2, only five states could have a comprehensive water shutoff moratorium in place: California, New Jersey, New York, Vermont and Washington State.
- [NRDC - "Congress & States Must Protect Water Access During COVID-19"](#)

## Shutoff Data

- In Florida, [Orlando](#) and [Jacksonville](#) shut off hundreds of households a day from water and power in July and August. Orlando alone had [15,000 customers](#) who were eligible for shut off, and in Jacksonville, JEA had disconnected [22,000 customers](#) since July 10, as of October 8.
- In South Carolina, Charleston shut off water service to [3,137 households](#) in the last two weeks of August, and another [4,000 customers were at risk of shutoff as of September 1](#).
- In Tennessee, Memphis, [9,000 homes were disconnected](#) from utilities on August 24, the first day of resumed shutoffs, and around 31,000 customers were at risk of being cut off.
- In Texas, Laredo said that [17,000 households](#) were behind on their bills and could be shut off from water, as of September 3 - that's nearly 20% of its customers.
- In Illinois, Aqua Illinois sent out **15,120 water shutoff notices** in August - that's 20% of its customers. The state ICC moratorium expired September 1 (source: [docket information](#)).
- In Arizona, Mesa had [9,240 customers](#) and Scottsdale had 1,422 customers who were behind on their bills and could face water shutoff as of September 1.
- In Alabama, [12,000 customers](#) of Birmingham Water Works were facing shutoff as of October 14.
- In Pennsylvania, as of September, regulated water utilities reported **106,766 residential customers were at risk of disconnection**; the PUC moratorium ends November 9 (source: [docket information](#)).
- In North Carolina, **146,704 residential customers became eligible for water shutoff in July** (source: [docket information](#)).