



● **Communication and Legislation Committee Report**

Summary

This letter provides information on activities in External Affairs, relating to community outreach and state and federal legislative activities.

Purpose

Informational

Attachments

None

Detailed Report

Background

External Affairs is working with member agencies, community leaders, organizations and policymakers to respond to and support efforts to address the human and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to advance Metropolitan's priority policy objectives and to maintain effective outreach activities throughout the service area.

Federal Legislative Report

COVID-19 Relief Package Update

Work is proceeding slowly on the next round of federal COVID-19 relief bills. The Senate held oversight hearings in June to assess the impact of previous aid packages and evaluate what additional steps are needed for economic recovery.

Metropolitan staff continues to advocate for aid to public agencies impacted by the pandemic, including special districts. Working with a broad coalition, including the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, Association of California Water Agencies, California Special Districts Association, and the National Water Resources Association, Metropolitan has advocated support for H.R. 7073 (Garamendi), the Special Districts Provide Essential Services Act. H.R. 7073 would define "special district" in federal law and designate a share of future federal relief funds (5 percent) to special districts for COVID-19 related expenditures. In addition, the bill directs the Federal Reserve to allow special districts to more easily access to the Municipal Liquidity Facility program. This program provides federally guaranteed "bridge financing" to offset unexpected short-term revenue shortfalls. Senators Feinstein and Harris are also working on expanding access to this fund. On June 15, they sent a letter to the Treasury Department requesting changes to the program.

Congress is expected to consider the next COVID-19 relief bill in July.

Infrastructure Stimulus Bill Update

The House released its version of the infrastructure stimulus bill, H.R. 2 (DeFazio D-OR), the "Moving Forward Act." The bill includes many provisions Metropolitan supports including:

- Grants to help water utilities to pay for capital costs associated with treatment for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)
- Increased funding for the Bureau of Reclamation's water recycling and reuse programs
- Assistance to disadvantaged communities for improved access to safe drinking water

Board Report (Communication and Legislation Committee Report)

- Increased funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's State Revolving Loan funds, including grants, negative interest loans, and principle forgiveness
- Federal tax exemption for water conservation and efficiency rebates (a measure that Metropolitan has been pursuing for the past five years)

Congressman Costa sponsored an amendment to H.R. 2 to authorize \$400 million for repairs to the California Aqueduct and Delta Mendota Canal along with funding for ecosystem restoration, sustainable groundwater management practices, and clean drinking water programs for disadvantaged communities. Metropolitan staff worked to build support for this amendment. Despite endorsement from a variety of stakeholders including the Environmental Defense Fund, Nature Conservancy, this amendment was not adopted.

State of California Legislative Report

State Budget Update

The Legislature and Governor reached agreement on a \$202.1 billion budget. The revised budget closes the \$54 billion budget gap by raising taxes on businesses, using \$7.8 billion from the rainy day fund, cutting state employee salaries, and deferring required payments to schools with the expectation of additional federal relief funds. The budget prioritizes funding for homelessness, healthcare, education, and wildfire preparation.

There is \$500 million earmarked for local governments from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Counties will receive \$1.289 billion for COVID-19 response, cities with populations greater than 300,000 will receive direct reimbursements, and smaller cities will receive funds through their counties.

The budget also authorizes \$50 million for grants to cities, counties and special districts to support wildfire emergency preparedness and community resilience that can be used to purchase emergency standby generators. There is funding for Sustainable Groundwater Management implementation and floodplain restoration projects. The State Water Resources Control Board will get 48 new positions to support the implementation of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Program, and funding to update uniform statewide criteria for non-potable recycled water use.

Legislative Update

The Legislature will reconvene from summer recess on July 13 and begin hearing policy bills in the second house. Staff is monitoring all bills of interest. Of particular note are SB 1099 (Dodd, D-Napa), the emergency backup generator bill sponsored by Las Virgenes Municipal Water District and CMUA which is in the Assembly, and SB 625 (Bradford, D-Gardena) that would put Central Basin Municipal Water District into receivership. This bill passed the Assembly and is now with the Senate to concur with the Assembly amendments.

Neither AB 3256 (E. Garcia, D-Coachella) nor SB 45 (Allen, D-Santa Monica) to put a climate bond on the November 2020 ballot were taken up by the legislative deadline so chances of a bond moving forward this year are now remote. However, a handful of constitutional amendments were enacted and will be before the state's voters this November, including ACA 5 (Weber, D-San Diego) which would repeal Proposition 209 (1996) that prohibited affirmative action in university admissions and public employment and contracting.

Board Report (Communication and Legislation Committee Report)

External Affairs Management Report

External Affairs staff have been working to creatively adapt in the COVID-19 landscape and continue community, business and legislative outreach remotely. Even with the impacts on programming, the FY 2020/21 year produced many notable achievements for Metropolitan’s communications and outreach activities. A few of the highlights are:

- Hosted 39 inspection trips, sponsored more than 100 community-based and conservation events and directly connected with 59,000 students, parents and teachers through education curriculum and programming.
- Broadened direct outreach and coordination with member agencies to reach multi-lingual audiences, disadvantaged communities, tribes and younger audiences using focused messaging and new communication tools.
- Organized seven Community Leaders Briefings, in partnership with member agencies and members of Congress and the State Senate and Assembly, providing an engaging experience on Metropolitan’s priority policies and projects to more than 750 local community and business leaders and influencers.
- Commemorated the Grand Opening of the Regional Recycled Water Advanced Purification Center, and hosted both in-person and virtual tours of the facility for the public and students.
- Participated in 120 business outreach events and webinars, including the Connect to Met program for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and a major veteran’s business conference with other utilities in the region to promote opportunities for contracting, services and other activities.
- Developed new microsites for the Integrated Regional Water Plan, career technical education, the Delta, climate change and the Colorado River, as well as updates to the recycled water and innovation web pages, providing a better user interface, updated information and new video content. Visits to Metropolitan’s website exceeded 500,000 for the year.
- Significantly increased both reach and impressions for social media with a record 14 million impressions. The highest performing posts included those featuring Metropolitan employees and the “Wasting Water Is…” series of videos on conservation.