

2018: LEGISLATIVE YEAR IN REVIEW

By Heather Baez



The 2018 legislative session ended on August 31, 2018 with 1,217 bills reaching Governor Jerry Brown's desk for his signature or veto. Of those, 1,016 were signed into law, and 201 were vetoed. It was Governor Brown's highest veto percentage at 16.5%.

While much of the Legislature's focus this year was on wildfire liability, net neutrality, and eliminating cash bail for certain crimes, it was still a busy a year for water. Early in the legislative session, a two-bill package implementing Governor Brown's Executive Order, *Making Conservation a California Way of Life* was passed. Among other requirements, these bills call for retail water providers to establish urban water use objectives for their service area, and reform and enhance urban drought planning requirements.

SB 998 (Dodd) will prohibit discontinuation of residential water service for nonpayment until a customer has been delinquent for at least 60 days. Additionally, the bill limits a water provider's ability to discontinue service if the customer is delinquent on a payment required under an amortization agreement, alternative payment schedule or plan for deferred or reduced payment plan. It also limits reconnection fees and interest charges on past due bills. Despite widespread opposition from water providers statewide, the bill was signed into law by Governor Brown and will take effect in 2020.

SB 623 (Monning) better known as the "water tax" failed to gain traction as many legislators were reluctant to vote for a new tax in an election year. The meter tax would be collected by individual water providers and sent to the State Water Resources Control Board for the purpose of securing access to safe drinking water for all Californians. Late in the legislative session, Senator Monning introduced SB 845 which would have required retail customers to "opt out" of this voluntary water tax. We all agree that Californians should have safe drinking water, but imposing a tax on water, instead of using General Fund dollars to pay for it is not the best way to solve this issue. Neither SB 623 nor SB 845 were taken up for a vote, but this issue is far from over. Alternative proposals are currently being developed for consideration in 2019.