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MEMBER AGENCY OF THE
METROPOLITAN WATER
DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Glen D. Peterson
MWD Representative

November 17, 2019

The Honorable Ben Hueso, Chairman
Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4035
Sacramento, CA 95814

Attention Nidia Bautista, Chief Consultant

**Oversight Hearing on Electric Utility Power Shutoffs: Identifying
Lessons Learned and Actions to Protect Californians**

Dear Chairman Hueso:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the oversight hearing on *Electric Utility Power Shutoffs: Identifying Lessons Learned and Actions to Protect Californians* and for your leadership to ensure that utilities effectively handle the unprecedented challenges we collectively face in California.

Given the large number of witnesses and complexity of topic, I am submitting the enclosed written testimony to supplement my brief oral summary planned for the hearing tomorrow. Please accept this document for the record and share it with the Committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David W. Pedersen, P.E.
General Manager

DWP:dwp

Encl.

cc: The Honorable Henry Stern, Senator
Board of Directors
Association of California Water Agencies
California Municipal Utilities Association
California Special Districts Association

Senate Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications
Oversight Hearing on Electric Utility Power Shutoffs: Identifying Lessons
Learned and Actions to Protect Californians

Monday, November 18, 2019 at 11:00 a.m.

**Testimony of David W. Pedersen, General Manager
Las Virgenes Municipal Water District**

Chair Hueso, Vice-Chair Moorlach and Members of the Committee:

Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your leadership to ensure that utilities throughout California effectively handle the unprecedented challenges that we collectively face to serve the state's 39 million people. My name is David Pedersen, and I am the General Manager of Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD), a retail water and wastewater agency serving approximately 70,000 people in the westernmost portion of Los Angeles County. My agency was severely impacted by last year's devastating Woolsey Fire that burned two-thirds of our service area and resulted in over \$6 million in damages to our facilities, not to mention the hundreds of customers who lost their homes. The Woolsey Fire provided us with an important reminder of the need to invest in resiliency for emergencies like wildfires, earthquakes, floods and, the subject of today's hearing, Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events.

I will share my agency's individual experience with PSPS events along with feedback gathered by the Association of California Water Agencies from water managers across the state. As you know, water and energy are inextricably connected, and the connection is particularly evident during emergencies. Without electricity, water utilities cannot pump and treat water that is essential to customers for health and safety purposes, including cooking, cleaning, bathing and sanitation. It is also critical for water agencies to maintain adequate pressure in their systems to support firefighting efforts. **The goal of water and wastewater agencies is to maintain continuous service to their customers at all times, even during PSPS events, given the consequences of a service interruption.**

LVMWD Experience and Communication Protocols:

Electrical service for LVMWD is provided by Southern California Edison (SCE). LVMWD has received 66 PSPS event notifications with 10 events that actually resulted in a power shutoff. Four water system facilities were affected by the events that lasted in duration from several hours to two days. LVMWD's experience has been that SCE's notifications are both timely and accurate. However, water agencies from other parts of the state have expressed concerns with the amount of advance notice provided for PSPS events, the accuracy and granularity of the data provided and the need for better notification on service restoration. **This feedback indicates that there is value to consider enhancing and/or standardizing communication protocols for PSPS events.** Interactive maps that provide information statewide on PSPS notifications and events may be valuable tools. In addition, it is important to ensure that the information provided is clear, consistent and understandable to a broad range of affected customers.

Operational Challenges:

PSPS events present a variety of operational challenges for water and wastewater agencies. Upon notification of an event, water system operators typically switch their pumps to manual mode to fill their tanks to maximum levels. In addition, the levels in the tanks are not allowed to fluctuate through the normal range; tanks are held to remain full or near full to be sure that adequate water is available should a shutoff be triggered. This process can result in additional costs for pumping during peak periods that are normally avoided and for overtime when staff are called out during non-working hours. Water system operators need to deploy portable emergency backup generators for water production, treatment and pumping facilities that are not equipped with sources of backup power. When PSPS notifications encompass a large area, some water agencies need to rent emergency backup generators to cover all of the potentially affected facilities.

When a PSPS event is triggered, water system operators must activate backup power sources, including emergency backup generators, and ensure the continuous operation of the equipment for the duration of the event. Refueling of generators is necessary and requires shuttling of fuel supplies from the source to the place(s) of need. Mechanics and electricians also need to be available on standby to address failures or other problems

that can arise with generators. For its PSPS events, LVMWD was able to maintain continuous service to its customers with the use of emergency backup generators. However, during the Woolsey Fire, LVMWD experienced a generator failure that temporarily interrupted pumping for a portion of its service area, causing low water pressure and issuance of a Boil Water Notice.

To maintain continuous service during emergencies and PSPS events, LVMWD and water agencies throughout the state need to increase their focus on rigorous maintenance and testing of emergency backup generators to ensure their reliability. The equipment needs to be exercised and load tested in accordance with manufacturer recommendations and standards issued by the National Fire Protection Association. However, **strict runtime limits prescribed by state and local air quality regulations can be a barrier for water and wastewater utilities to prepare and operate their generators for PSPS events. Additional flexibility is needed to maintain, test and operate emergency backup generators that are designated for critical water system facilities.**

Financial Challenges:

Water and wastewater agencies also face financial challenges to effectively prepare for and respond to PSPS events. Agencies experience increased operating costs associated with additional labor and overtime expenditures, equipment rentals, peak period pumping and fuel purchases. In addition, PSPS events are contributing to the need for significant capital investments by water and wastewater agencies to improve the resiliency of their systems for power outages. These investments not only include the purchase of new portable emergency generators, which are in short supply, but also the upgrade of facilities to include stationary generators and emergency transfer switchgear. For example, Eastern Municipal Water District, which is a large retail water and wastewater agency serving a 555-square mile service area in western Riverside County, has estimated the need to invest up to \$16.5 million to install permanent generators at 26 of its critical potable water booster stations that currently do not have backup power. By extrapolating this figure statewide, the investment need could potentially exceed several hundred million dollars.

Governor Gavin Newsom's recent launch of the Local Government PSPS Resiliency Program was an excellent first-step; however, **additional financial assistance from the state is needed to address PSPS resiliency for water and wastewater agencies, many of which are independent special districts.** The initial \$75 million General Fund appropriation for the program was limited to state, county and incorporated city government; independent special district are not eligible for the funds.

Conclusion:

Electrical service providers as important utility partners for water agencies, and we are committed to work with our utility counterparts to implement PSPS events effectively. We also recognize that PSPS events are a key interim measure to reduce the potential for wildfires that can be caused by power lines. However, **PSPS events should not be viewed as a long-term solution to reduce the threat of wildfire. Utilities across the state need to make significant investments to improve their resiliency. Additional financial assistance from the state is needed to address PSPS resiliency for water and wastewater agencies, many of which are independent special districts.**

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