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December 12, 2016

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: URGENT Request for Veto of S612 – WRDA/WIIN and the California Drought Bill

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing because the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary, our home, is under threat, and we need your help.

I am the executive director for Restore the Delta, a grassroots education, outreach, and advocacy organization of 40,000 members. We work to protect the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary for our children and future generations by advocating for public policies that protect Delta water quality and quantity.

Senator Barbara Boxer eloquently spoke on the floor of the U.S. Senate this past Friday of the real dilemma contained within S612. In so many ways, it is a good bill, particularly because of the assistance it will give to our brothers and sisters in Flint, Michigan. As a clean water advocate, I want what is best for the people of Flint.

This is where S612 sadly is problematic. There is a long pattern in California, and now at the Federal level, of good bills containing poison pills to the continued detriment of the environmental health of the Delta. Consistently, as with S612, these riders always center on an effort to take more and more fresh water out of the estuary to ship to large industrial agricultural businesses in the San Joaquin Valley. It is thirty years of the over extraction of water that has led to the present fishery crisis.

Our fear is that if we continue to take too much water from the estuary, the end result will be a public health crisis for the millions of people who live in the Delta, and the hundreds of thousands of people who make up the Delta's environmental justice community. Over these last few years of drought, the Delta has seen a marked increase of toxic algal blooms, and without more cool water regularly flowing throughout the Delta, these outbreaks are expected to become a permanent feature of the Delta. The toxic bacteria from the algal blooms are a threat to: 1) groundwater wells that provide drinking and irrigation water to tens of thousands of people; 2) municipal drinking water systems that provide drinking water to hundreds of thousands of people; 3) subsistence fishers who in conservative estimates number

between 20,000 and 40,000 residents of the Delta; 4) the ability of Delta farmers to safely irrigate their 500,000 acres of crops worth \$5.2 billion annually; 5) and tens of thousands of recreational enthusiasts who regularly sportfish, boat, and swim in the Delta's 1100 miles of open waterways. Increased water exports resulting from the implementation of S612—WRDA will increase exports, especially during drought periods, creating increased opportunities for the proliferation of these dangerous toxic algal blooms, and increase public health threats.

I could write several more pages about the water quality challenges we face as a result of exporting too much water from the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary, including increased salinity which damages crops, increased residence time of harmful constituents like selenium, and boron, and increases in the methylation of Mercury, I think it may be more important for you to know that Stockton, CA, the Delta's largest city is in many ways like Flint, Michigan, and if its source water quality continues to deteriorate as a result of the mismanagement of the Delta, Stockton could end up with a comparable public health and economic crisis.

Delta water quality directly impacts Stockton's municipal and industrial water supply because Stockton draws a significant portion of its supply from its Delta Water Supply Project, with about 20% of its water supply coming from groundwater sources that are becoming more saline over time as a result of Delta water exports. As more fresh water is drawn from the Delta pumps for export, greater levels of salt water move eastward through the Delta and into San Joaquin County's groundwater supply. Salt water, increased harmful constituents, and bacteria will make water treatment more and more difficult and costly for its residents.

For Stockton, salinity and greater concentrations of harmful constituents have the potential to harm over 300,000 people. According to the 2016 Distressed Community Index created by the Economic Innovation Group, Stockton is the sixth most economically distressed large city in the United States with a distress score of 95% (0-100 scale). Half of its population lives on minimum wage or less, and half its overall median income ratio is 74% of the national average. High school graduation rates at the city's center are only 50%, and 49% of its adult population was not working during this 2010-13 survey period. 70% of Stockton's residents live in economically distressed zip codes, and close to a third of Stockton families with young children live in poverty. Stockton is also a majority-minority city, made up of numerous ethnic groups with over 40% of its population identifying according to U.S. Census Data as Latino, and 10% as African-American. About 50% of Stockton's population qualifies as an environmental justice community. The potential for increased costs for water treatment could further disproportionately burden this environmental justice community, numbering over 150,000 residents, when paying for drinking water supplies.

While distressed, the Stockton metropolitan region has prospects for growth and sustainability in jobs and economic development, at least some of which depend on protection and improving Delta region water quality. Agriculture is the primary economic driver for the city; however, even small increases in Delta water salinity decrease agricultural yields, and limit agricultural market choices for Delta family farmers – who are California's oldest farming families. S612—WRDA will have a negative impact on Stockton's financial and economic recovery.

Other Delta cities like Antioch, Lathrop, West Sacramento, and towns like Clarksburg and Isleton are also made up of sizeable environmental justice populations that depend on Delta water for domestic uses and agricultural employment.

Last, increased water exports result in greater contamination of Delta fish, which are consumed by tens of thousands of Delta residents, who are Delta subsistence fishers. Stockton, Antioch,

and other portions of the five-county Delta region have vast expanses of food deserts. Delta fish supplement the diets for the poorest members of our communities; degraded water quality has a direct impact on their health outcomes.

Sadly, this is where S612—WRDA fails. It will worsen water quality not only for San Francisco Bay-Delta fisheries, but for the hundreds of thousands of people who make up the Delta's environmental justice communities. We sincerely want to see the people of Flint, Michigan assisted with the water quality tragedy that they are living through, but we don't want our communities set up for further water quality failures. S612 will lead to further water quality degradation in the San Francisco Bay-Delta, and set the course for future raids by Federal agencies on freshwater supplies from the Delta.

This is why we ask, with a heavy heart, that you veto S612. S612 will lead to a proliferation of environmental justice communities with degraded water supplies that will leave local Delta residents with burdensome water treatment costs, lost job prospects, and contaminated fish which is an important part of their diets.

We thank you in advance for considering our request. We empathize with how difficult this decision will be for you to make.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla".

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla
Executive Director

cc:

Senator Barbara Boxer, California
Senator-elect, Kamala Harris, California
Congressman Jerry McNerney, California
Mayor-elect Michael Tubbs, Stockton, California