

# Brown pushes to consolidate water agencies

By Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

The Brown administration is pushing late-emerging budget legislation to let state officials force the consolidation of troubled water systems with larger, better-funded agencies, with the goal of improving Californians' access to safe drinking water after four years of drought.

Proponents say the measure would help people around the state, many of them poor, who depend on small agencies that have little wherewithal to deal with water shortages and quality problems. The measure could go before the Legislature as early as this week.

"Critical times require innovative measures," said Omar Carrillo, senior water analyst for the Community Water Center, an environmental justice group that supports the proposal. "Communities deserve more tools to secure their safe drinking water needs." He estimated that there are a few dozen small agencies in the Central Valley alone that should be consolidated with larger neighbors.

The proposal, though, has generated intense opposition from water agencies and local government groups. Larger water agencies fear absorbing the expenses and liability of other systems, even as their existing customers face tough state-imposed conservation measures. Smaller agencies, some of which have their own governing boards, criticize the loss of local control.

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