

*[Assuming Rep. Levin introduces Sandy]* Before I begin my testimony, I want to sincerely thank Congressman Levin for his kind words and steadfast support of the Water Authority and our region.

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, Congressman Levin and to the rest of the members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing to discuss desalination in our region and to support H.R. 7612 – the Desalination Research Advancement Act.

My name is Sandra Kerl and I am the General Manager of the San Diego County Water Authority. Our agency – created in 1944 – is responsible for providing wholesale water supplies to 24 retail member agencies who serve 3.3 million San Diego County residents and support a \$240 billion regional economy. I would note for the Committee that nine of the County's 18 incorporated cities and 15 of the County's 30 unincorporated community planning areas are considered disadvantaged communities. This makes our mission at the Authority all that much more critical.

I have been with the Water Authority since 2009 and was formally appointed General Manager by the Board of Directors in November 2019. Surprising to me, the first crisis that I was tasked with addressing in this role had nothing to do with water. Just months after being appointed, the nation was brought to a standstill by the COVID pandemic; and I needed to create a safe working environment for our 250 employees while ensuring our member agencies had the resources they needed to supply clean water to our residents.

Fortunately, we were able to construct a plan to keep our employees safe and our facilities delivering water to the region.

This was also a time when our state, and the entire west, was enveloped in a historic drought – which still persists today. The semi-arid San Diego region has very little natural resources; 1946 was the last year the region had sufficient local supplies to meet demand. For more than 70 years, the San Diego County Water Authority has imported water to meet the San Diego region's needs through times of drought, economic expansion and population growth. The county has relied on Colorado River water since 1946. The San Diego region secured its own highly reliable conserved Colorado River supplies with the historic Quantification Settlement Agreement of 2003. These locally controlled supplies include a water conservation and transfer agreement with the Imperial Irrigation District and water conserved by lining long stretches of the All-American and Coachella canals. The county also receives some imported water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta via the State Water Project. Water from the Bay-Delta is a critical resource and San Diego County continues to reduce reliance on it consistent with the State law.

The Authority and its member agencies have made significant investments in local water supplies, to include surface storage, groundwater, water recycling and potable reuse, and of course seawater desalination.

These investments in a diverse local water supply are why our region has been able to keep the faucets running in our service area even during this historic drought. This is in large part due to our embarking on a public-private partnership to develop the largest ocean desalination plant in

the nation – the Claude “Bud” Lewis Carlsbad Desalination plant. This facility currently delivers approximately 56,000 acre-feet per year (or 50 million gallons per day) of fresh, clean water for consumption by our residents. With targeted investments, this facility has the capability to increase water deliveries by upwards of 10 percent. This project and our decades-long conservation efforts are major factors in why we continue to have reliable water supplies for our ratepayers even in the midst of this historic drought.

Desalination has been instrumental in terms of diversifying our water portfolio to protect our residents in times of drought. The public-private partnership model allowed us to construct this facility without federal taxpayer dollars.

### ***H.R. 7612 – Desalination Research Advancement Act***

Congressman Mike Levin has been a longtime supporter of our Carlsbad desalination plant and efforts to utilize desalination technology across the country. That is why I am proud to be here today to testify in support of H.R. 7612, the Desalination Research Advancement Act. This legislation amends the Water Desalination Act of 1996, which was enacted into law to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to award grants to conduct, encourage, and assist in research and development of desalination technologies. This historic law also directed the Secretary to administer demonstration and development programs to address technical design and construction, to assess potential marketability of byproducts of desalination, and to assess the financial feasibility to developing desalination plants. It is safe to say that we may not have our desalination plant today if not for Congress passing this law in 1996.

Congressman Levin’s legislation aims to support these efforts by increasing the current authorization for desalination research and development from \$5 million per year to \$20 million per year. The legislation also increases the annual award cap for institutions of higher education from \$1 million to \$15 million. Additionally, H.R. 7612 directs the Secretary to also prioritize, among other things, research and development projects that would aim to minimize the impacts of desalination on aquatic life and coastal ecosystems.

The Authority is currently working with our private partner on a water intake improvement project to do just that – further minimize impacts to aquatic life. We anticipate this project will cost roughly \$80 million dollars. The legislation providing additional funds for research will benefit projects like the Authority’s project by looking at different technologies that are less expensive and minimize impacts. Affordability and accessibility are important components that will make desalination projects successful and ensure reliable supplies.

Legislative efforts like the one before us today aim to make desalination more accessible and more affordable, which is a goal that the Authority whole heartedly supports. During a time of historic drought, it is imperative to continue to expand the use of technologies to provide reliable, clean drinking water.

In closing, the Authority is proud to support the Congressman and the Committee in their pursuit to make desalination more affordable, efficient, and attractive to water providers across the country. H.R. 7612 aims to do just that.

Thank you.