

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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April 18, 2023

The Honorable Aisha Wahab
Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee
1020 N Street, Room 545
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 753 (Caballero) – SUPPORT
As Amended March 20, 2023

Dear Senator Wahab:

On behalf of the County of El Dorado Board of Supervisors, we support Senate Bill 753 (Caballero). This measure clarifies existing state law to explicitly penalize illegal cannabis growers who pollute groundwater and illegally “take” water.

Illegal cannabis farms are a serious, growing threat throughout California. Illicit cannabis cultivators frequently engage in human trafficking, water theft, and environmental pollution as part of their operations. Because some sites go undetected for years, the potential environmental damage could last for generations. The widespread use of dangerous and unregistered pesticides at illegal cannabis farms can be lethal to both humans and wildlife, posing immediate and long-term risks to those working in and near these sites and can pollute community drinking water sources. In addition, many of the communities plagued with illicit cannabis cultivation continually face drought emergencies, reinforcing the need to protect this finite resource.

California state law penalties are not strong enough to deter criminals from engaging in widespread illegal cannabis farming, nor does it recognize the danger illegal grows pose to water supply and groundwater pollution. CalMatters recently reported that these actions have resulted in completely disrupting or jeopardizing water sources for many areas throughout the state. Additional tools are needed to protect the public’s health and safety as well as further discourage illicit cannabis operators while strengthening the market for those who operate legally.

SB 753 amends Section 11358 of the Health and Safety Code to include groundwater as a public resource, and establish that the theft of groundwater, unauthorized tapping into a water conveyance or storage infrastructure, or digging an unpermitted illegal well, may also be punished by imprisonment. Stronger penalties are an important step to deter illicit cannabis activities and the harmful effect it is having on our limited water resources.

For these reasons, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors respectfully requests your “Aye” vote when this bill is heard before your committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wendy Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Wendy Thomas
Chair, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors