



Michael Laws
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Senator Gowan and Representatives Griffin and Diaz
1700 W. Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Subject: Request to Remove Municipalities from SB 1221

Dear Senator Gowan and Representatives Diaz and Griffin,

On behalf of the Willcox community I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding Senate Bill 1221 and its disproportionate impact on the City of Willcox and similar municipalities. The bill, as currently proposed, prioritizes agricultural water use over the needs of the public. It also creates numerous challenges and places unfair burdens for rural residents and jeopardizes our community's ability to grow economically. The following points are a summary of our concerns:

1. **Equity in Water Usage:** The bill's provisions allow the Director to allocate water based on municipal usage over the last five years while guaranteeing agricultural users the highest allocation from the past two years. This discrepancy undermines equitable water distribution and favors agricultural interests disproportionately.
2. **Puts Financial Hardships on the General Public:** By mandating that municipalities purchase water from agricultural users, the bill could subject cities like Willcox, where incomes are notably low, to unsustainable financial pressures. Currently, the median household income is \$41,250 and 23% of residents live below the federal poverty level, with 31% of those below the poverty line being Hispanic. The potential for exorbitant costs could severely strain the city's water enterprise budget and hold resident's hostage who rely on affordable water services.
3. **City Representation:** The absence of municipal representation, including voices from Willcox, in the decision-making committee undermines the democratic process. Ensuring municipal representation is crucial to balance the diverse needs, interests and represent the largest user group in the Willcox Basin.
4. **Impact on Rural Development and Economy:** The constraints imposed by SB 1221 could hinder residential development and economic growth in Willcox, a city where new housing and business expansion are essential for community vitality. The bill's current framework appears to prioritize agricultural prosperity at the expense of urban and residential growth, restricting the city's ability to attract new businesses and residents, which is crucial for our future prosperity. In the last 10 years only 23 single family homes and one eighth-plex has been constructed. The housing supply in Willcox is ageing and



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new construction is vital. In conversations with local businesses, the biggest issue in attracting qualified and dependable employees is housing.

5. **Inefficiency and Waste:** The bill may inadvertently promote water wastage by not aligning incentives with conservation. While Willcox has demonstrated a commitment to prudent water use, the same cannot be said for all agricultural stakeholders, some of whom have been maximizing usage in anticipation of regulatory changes.
6. **Disproportionate Impact on Water Crisis:** It is crucial to highlight that the City of Willcox's water use is minimal in comparison to agricultural consumption. While residents and businesses in Willcox use approximately 504 acre feet of water per year, agricultural users consume over 214,100 acre feet of water annually. This stark contrast illustrates that the general public's water usage in Willcox is only .2% compared to that of agriculture, clearly indicating that the city's water use is not a significant contributor to the regional water crisis.

Our Solutions:

Given these points, I urge you to reconsider the implications of SB 1221 for municipalities like Willcox and offer two solutions. If this bill must go forward, we request that you remove municipalities from oversight or until a municipality reaches 20% of the water used in the basin. Secondly, I recommend investing in the establishment of a rural Water District that would serve the broader interests of residents in Sunsites, Cochise, Sunizona and Willcox. Such a district would support sustainable growth, economic diversification, and improved water security for all, particularly benefiting those on fixed incomes or facing water scarcity (see Maps).

The City of Willcox is keen to engage constructively in this matter, offering insights and cooperation to develop solutions that serve the common good and foster regional prosperity. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I look forward to your supportive action and response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Laws".

Mayor Michael Laws