



March 2, 2016

Councilmember Herb Wesson, Chair  
Rules, Elections & Intergovernmental Relations and Neighborhoods Committee  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

CC: Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Los Angeles City Council  
City Controller Ron Galperin

**RE: Oppose Motion to Weaken Public Oversight over LADWP**

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Food & Water Watch and our members in Los Angeles, we urge you to oppose a motion from Councilmember Fuentes that would undermine democratic governance and public oversight over the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). This motion would make LADWP less accountable and would undermine efforts to improve the ways in which LADWP sources and provides water and power.

The proposed motion would remove city council oversight of rate increases, contracts and bulk water sales. By removing democratic control over LADWP, it would facilitate the abuse of the LADWP customers via unjustified rate hikes, outsourcing, privatization and bulk water sales to the oil and gas industry and bottled water companies. The motion could also further entrench policies that must be reformed, such as the utility's dangerous dependence on imported natural gas and imported water, which come at great expense to LADWP customers and the environment.

We must retain city council oversight over these major decisions. The department provides services too essential to public health and wellbeing to transfer such control to an unelected board. Without ballot-box accountability, it is nearly impossible to hold appointed officials on the DWP board accountable for the decisions they make.

In addition, the motion proposes to decimate LADWP's Civil Service system, thereby eliminating objective standards (and third party, fully transparent enforcement of those standards) in hiring, promotions and seniority, for example. Civil service is a merit-based system of personnel management that has effectively prevented City Hall corruption and cronyism for decades. Because this system also levels the playing field in hiring, it was used by Mayor Tom Bradley to bring underrepresented people into the City workforce. These civil service rules are proud pillars of Los Angeles' democratic tradition and has given the City a competent and diverse workforce.

At a time when greater public oversight over LADWP is needed, this motion seeks to promote a corporate style of management that could make LADWP's problems worse and further erode public confidence in the utility. Strong public oversight, accountability, scrutiny, transparency and criticism are the best ways to ensure that every LA resident has access to safe, affordable, and sustainable water and power.

Sincerely,

Brenna Norton, Senior Organizer, Food & Water Watch  
Conner Everts, Executive Director, Southern California Watershed Alliance