



DIRECT PAYMENT AGREEMENT

THIS DIRECT PAYMENT AGREEMENT (Agreement) is made and entered into effective as of the date signed below (the "Effective Date"), by and between

Sonoma County Water Agency

("the Water System"),

404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, CA 95403

(Entity Address)

and **HORNE LLP**, a Delaware limited liability partnership, having a place of business at 661 Sunnybrook Road, Suite 100, Ridgeland, MS 39157 ("HORNE").

WHEREAS, the California Department of Community Services and Development ("CSD") is authorized to administer the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program ("LIHWAP" or "Program") to provide financial assistance to help low-income Californians manage their residential water utility costs;

WHEREAS, CSD has contracted with HORNE to disburse direct payments to water systems to apply a LIHWAP credit to households identified as eligible for LIHWAP assistance by CSD or its Local Service Providers (LSPs);

WHEREAS, CSD has authorized HORNE to enter into this Agreement with Water System; and

WHEREAS, the Water System desires to enroll in LIHWAP and participate in the direct payment service established by the Direct Payment Program.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual covenants herein contained, the Water System agrees to receive direct payments from HORNE for the benefit of California residents who qualify for LIHWAP and agrees to abide by all terms and conditions below:

Direct Payment Program General Terms and Conditions

- 1.1 To participate in the Direct Payment Program, a Water System must be defined as a “Community Water System” or “Community Water System Billing Entity”, “Wastewater Treatment Provider” or “Wastewater Billing Entity” (collectively referred to as a “Water System” in this Agreement).
- 1.2 A “Community Water System” means a public water system with at least 15 service connections used by yearlong residents or regularly services at least 25 yearlong residents.
- 1.3 A “Community Water System Billing Entity” means a third-party entity that is the designated billing entity for a community water system.
- 1.4 A “Wastewater Treatment Provider” means a city, county, special district, or joint powers authority that provides wastewater collection, treatment, or disposal service through a publicly owned treatment works.
- 1.5 A “Wastewater Billing Entity” means a local government entity (city, county, or special district) that is the designated billing entity for a wastewater treatment provider.
- 1.6 The Water System enrolled in the Direct Payment Program must be the responsible entity for applying the LIHWAP credit to customer accounts.
- 1.7 Qualified low-income residential customers will be identified by CSD and its LSP partners. CSD will provide HORNE with a direct pay file that contains customer account information as well as the amount for the direct payment to the Water System for each customer. Commercial customers are not eligible for the program.
- 1.8 HORNE will provide the Water System a direct pay file that contains customer account information and the LIHWAP benefit amount for the purpose of crediting the accounts of qualified low-income residential customers of the Water System who have been identified as eligible for water assistance payments under LIHWAP by CSD or its LSPs.
- 1.9 HORNE will establish a secure method to provide the direct pay file and

customer information to the Water System and a secure method to receive the Direct Payment Summary from the Water System as described in 2.11.

- 1.10 The Water System is encouraged to offer a payment plan or other forms of assistance to customers who have a remaining balance after the LIHWAP benefit is applied to support the continuation of services or the restoration of services for accounts where services are terminated due to nonpayment.

Obligations of the Water System

- 2.1 Water System shall provide water and/or wastewater services to each eligible and approved residential household for which payment is provided under LIHWAP.
- 2.2 Water System shall charge LIHWAP residential households using the Water System's normal billing process, the difference between the actual amount due and the amount of the payment made by the LIHWAP payment.
- 2.3 Water System shall restore water services on a timely basis or remove disconnection status upon payment, if applicable, and shall confirm this action to HORNE by submission of the Direct Payment Summary report as specified in provision 2.11.
- 2.4 Water System shall charge all LIHWAP eligible residential households the same rates charged for home drinking water and/or wastewater services billed to other similarly situated residential households that are non-eligible, as determined by the approved rate setting process.
- 2.5 Water System shall not apply LIHWAP payments to account balances that have previously been written off or paid off with other customer assistance program funds. The Water System shall return issued LIHWAP payments to HORNE within 30 calendar days of receipt for accounts where the owed balance has been paid off with other customer assistance program funds or discharged (written off) in its entirety by the Water System along with the Direct Payment Summary specified in 2.11.

- 2.6 Water System shall apply the LIHWAP benefit to closed accounts to cover the pending balance and shall return any remaining amount of the LIHWAP payment to HORNE within 30 calendar days of receipt along with the Direct Payment Reconciliation Summary specified in 2.11.
- 2.7 Water Systems shall adhere to existing credit return policies when returning funds to a customer that received a LIHWAP benefit, and the account is later closed and there is a remaining LIHWAP credit balance on the account.
- 2.8 Water systems that include other services on the customer's bill shall only apply LIHWAP payments towards the water, wastewater, and/or storm water amount owed including any applicable late fees, reconnection fees, taxes, and other charges.
- 2.9 Water System shall not discriminate against a LIHWAP eligible household with respect to terms, deferred payment plans, credit, conditions of sale, or discounts offered to other customers.
- 2.10 Water System shall post all payments to customer accounts within 5 business days from receipt of payment.
- 2.11 Water System shall submit to HORNE a Direct Payment Summary (in a format provided by HORNE) that reconciles the associated direct pay file and return payments that could not be credited to customer accounts within 30 calendar days of receipt of payment. The Direct Payment Summary must contain information on the date the credit was posted, direct pay file date; the total number of customer accounts that the Water System was successful in fully crediting; and the total number of customer accounts that the Water System was not successful in crediting. For those customer accounts that were not credited, the Water System shall reflect in the Direct Payment Summary the customer accounts that were not credited to include customer account information (customer name, account number, account address, benefit amount), and reason why the LIHWAP benefit was unable to be applied to the customer's account. The Water System shall use customer and account information

contained in the direct pay file to complete the reporting and identification of customer accounts that were not credited.

- 2.12 Water System shall clearly enter, on the LIHWAP recipient's bill, the amount of LIHWAP payment(s) received and identify the payment was received from LIHWAP. The credit should appear on the first billing statement after the credit has been posted. If posting on the LIHWAP recipient's bill is not feasible, the Water System shall send customers a notification of the LIHWAP payment via phone call, letter, text, or email communication as soon as practicable.
- 2.13 Water System shall cooperate with any Federal or State investigation, audit, or program review related to the administration of LIHWAP to ensure funds are accurately applied to customer accounts in compliance with this Agreement, including allowing CSD and its designated representatives access to all books and records related to the receipt and posting of LIHWAP benefits under review.
- 2.14 Water System is informed that failure to cooperate with any Federal or State investigation, audit, or program review may result in the immediate suspension or disqualification from participation in LIHWAP.
- 2.15 Water System shall take corrective action in the time frame specified by the CSD if violations of this Agreement are discovered. Corrective action may include, but is not limited to, providing detailed documentation of changes made and detailed plans for future changes that will bring the Water System into compliance.
- 2.16 Water System is informed that failure to implement corrective actions may result in the immediate suspension or disqualification from participation in LIHWAP.
- 2.17 Water System shall comply with all federal and California privacy laws, and shall take all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the information provided by HORNE to the Water System. Water System agrees to provide required security to ensure the confidential, physical security and safekeeping of all data, information files, and documents ("customer information") pertaining to the recipients of LIHWAP utility assistance payments, while such customer information is in its possession. Water System will, in accordance with applicable

law and the terms of this Agreement, protect from unauthorized use and disclosure all sensitive data, documentation, or other customer information provided to Water System by HORNE, CSD, or CSD's LSPs for purposes of this Agreement.

Term

- 3.1 The term of this Agreement shall be the effective date of this contract through October 31, 2023.

Project Coordinator

- 4.1 The Project Coordinator is designated to manage all HORNE inquiries regarding direct payments, issues with the direct payment process, mishandled or incorrect payments, clarification and updates of reports, and fraud and abuse. The Project Coordinator during the term of this Agreement is listed below. The Water System may designate a different Project Coordinator by notifying HORNE in writing.

Water System's Project Coordinator

Name and Title: Lynne Rosselli

Company Name: Sonoma county Water Agency

Address: 404 Aviation Boulevard

City, State, and ZIP Code: Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Email: lynne.rosselli@scwa.ca.gov

Phone: (707) 524-3771

Additional Provisions

- 5.1 Amendment. All amendments to this Agreement shall be in writing, signed by HORNE and Water System.
- 5.2 Assignment. Neither this Agreement nor any of the rights, interests, or obligations under this Agreement shall be assigned by any party without the prior written consent of the other parties.
- 5.3 Merger/Entire Agreement. This Agreement (including the attachments, documents and instruments referred to in this Agreement) constitutes the entire agreement and understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter of this Agreement and supersedes all prior understandings and agreements, whether written or oral, among the parties with respect to such subject matter.
- 5.4 Nonwaiver. The waiver by either party of any breach of any term, covenant, or condition contained in this Agreement, or any default in the performance of any obligations under this Agreement, shall not be deemed to be a waiver of any other breach or default of the same or any other term, covenant, condition, or obligation; nor shall any waiver of any incident of breach or default constitute a continuing waiver of the same. All waivers shall be in writing.
- 5.5 Severability. If any provision of this Agreement is found invalid or unenforceable in any respect for any reason, the validity and enforceability of any such provision in any other respect and of the remaining provisions of this Agreement will not be in any way impaired and shall remain in full force and effect.
- 5.6 Venue. In the event that suit shall be brought by either party to this Agreement, the parties agree that venue shall be exclusively vested in the State Courts of the County of Sacramento, or where otherwise appropriate, exclusively in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California in Sacramento, California.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have signed this Agreement, or caused it to be signed by their duly authorized representatives "below".

HORNE LLP

By: _____

Name: Loden Snell

Title: Deputy Project Manager

Date: _____

Water System: Sonoma County Water Agency

By:  _____

Name: Grant Davis

Title: General Manager

Date: April 27, 2022