

Advocates sue Tulare for Matheny Tract water

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The Matheny Tract Committee is seeking a court order requiring Tulare to supply water to the 300-home rural subdivision south of the city.

The lawsuit against Tulare, filed last week by the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, a Fresno-based advocacy organization, responds to a lawsuit Tulare filed last month against the committee, Tulare County and Pratt Mutual Water Co., which currently supplies water to the largely poor community.

“It’s a disadvantaged community,” said Leadership Counsel lawyer Ashley Werner. “This is a basic human rights issue.”

Matheny Tract water exceeds allowable levels of arsenic, and many residents use bottled water for drinking and cooking. The state paid \$4.9 million to lay a water main from Tulare, but to date no water has flowed in the pipes.

The nearly two-year delay in supplying city water has been disappointing for residents.

“It’s like they have us as dolls, playing with us,” resident Reinelda Palma said in Spanish.

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Reinelda Palma, Matheny Tract resident

A bad well stopped the city from delivering water, but that problem has been solved, the city said.

But the city said in its lawsuit it wants to form a joint powers agreement or equivalent with the county to work outside city jurisdiction, and sell the water wholesale to another entity that would handle water meters and billing.

Tuesday, the county filed a document in court specifying that it’s not a party to the water supply agreement and wants to be dropped from the proceedings.

The parties are scheduled to make arguments in court Aug. 17.

Reporter Andrea Castillo contributed to this story.

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