Comite Lost Hills en Accion
Comite Progreso de Lamont
Committee for a Better Arvin
Committee for a Better Shafter
Greenfield Walking Group
Mural Arts | Environmental Justice Collaborative of Kern County
Science Policy Group at UCLA
Transition Albany
July 14, 2020

Senator Henry Stern, Chair
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
State Capitol, Room 5046
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 345 (Muratsuchi) Natural Resources: Environmental Justice: Oil and Gas: Regulation of Operations - SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Stern and Committee Members:

We write as a coalition in support of Assembly Bill 345 by Assemblymember Muratsuchi. AB 345 will mandate that the California Geological Energy Management Division (CalGEM) complete the public health and safety rulemaking started in November 2019, provide resources and venues for impacted communities to participate in the rulemaking process, and establish a health and safety buffer zone between oil and gas wells and sensitive land uses. AB 345 must pass this year in order to influence the CalGEM rulemaking.

AB 345 will protect children and communities from the health and safety hazards associated with oil and gas extraction. Nearly five and a half million Californians—mostly people of color—live within one mile of an oil or gas well.\(^1\) Studies link proximity to oil and gas wells to a host of health impacts, including increased risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses, pre-term births and high-risk pregnancies, some kinds of cancer, and depression and other adverse mental health outcomes.\(^2\) Oil and gas extraction produces toxic air pollutants, including volatile organic compounds (“VOCs”) like benzene and formaldehyde, fine and ultra-fine particulate matter (“PM”), and hydrogen sulfide. Other harms include water contamination, noise pollution, spills of toxic chemicals, and explosions. A safe distance between drilling operations and residences, schools, and other sensitive places is necessary to avoid these serious public health risks.

Of the approximately five and a half million Californians who live within a mile of one or more oil and gas wells, one-third live in areas most burdened by environmental pollution and 92 percent of Californians living in these overburdened neighborhoods are people of color.\(^3\) Given these disproportionate, cumulative impacts on communities of color and low-income communities, state action is long overdue to directly address the harms and risks from oil and gas extraction and to prioritize a just transition that protects workers and communities impacted by the phaseout of drilling in these sensitive areas.

As COVID-19 continues to spread across California, early research is showing the disproportionate impact the virus is having in communities burdened by air pollution and pre-existing health conditions. People sheltering in place in close proximity to oil and gas facilities are facing increased health risks by staying home. Preliminary


\(^2\) Center for Biological Diversity, Oil Stain: How Dirty Crude Undermines California’s Climate Progress (November 2017), [https://bit.ly/2Cn0ZEW](https://bit.ly/2Cn0ZEW)

research from Harvard University indicates that at the county level, COVID-19 mortality rates are higher in areas with elevated levels of fine particulate matter air pollution over the long term. Now more than ever, California must act to reduce exposure to pollution and improve public health – particularly in communities most impacted by COVID-19.

We request your “AYE” vote when AB 345 is heard in your committee, and urge you to work with us to support its passage as an urgent matter of public health.

Sincerely,

Katie Valenzuela  
Policy & Political Director  
CEJA Action  
katie@caleja.org

Ingrid Brostrom  
Assistant Director  
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE)  
ibrostrom@crpe-ej.org

Anna Cummins  
Co-Founder and Deputy Director  
The 5 Gyres Institute

Matt Leonard  
Special Projects  
350.org  
Matt@350.org (619) 246-0325

Nora Privitera  
Legislative Analyst  
350 Bay Area Action  
noraprivitera@comcast.net (510) 484-5992

Alan Weiner  
Chapter Lead  
350 Conejo San Fernando Valley

Laurie Litman  
President  
350 Sacramento

Nicole Kemeny  
President  
350 Silicon Valley

Sherry Lear  
Organizer  
350 South Bay Los Angeles

Barbara Rhine  
Chair, Legislative Working Group  
1000 Grandmothers for Future Generations

Kevin Koenig  
Climate and Energy Director  
Amazon Watch

Kevin Baker  
Director of Legislative Affairs  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Center for Advocacy & Policy CA

Liza Chu  
California Policy Manager  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - California

Sylvia Chi  
Policy Director  
Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)

Juan Altamirano  
Associate Director of Policy  
Audubon California

Marce Gutiérrez-Graudinš  
Founder / Executive Director  
Azul

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4 Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States. Xiao Wu, Rachel C. Nethery, Benjamin M. Sabath, Danielle Braun, Francesca Dominici. medRxiv 2020.04.05.20054502; doi: https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054502
Tony Hale  
Vice President  
Beach Cities Democrats (BCD)

Karuna Jaggar  
Executive Director  
Breast Cancer Action  
kjaggar@bcaction.org (415) 243-9301

Janet Nudelman  
Director of Program and Policy  
Breast Cancer Prevention Partners

Sean Bothwell  
Executive Director  
California Coastkeeper Alliance

Liore Milgrom-Gartner  
Northern California Director  
California Interfaith Power & Light

Melissa Romero  
Legislative Affairs Manager  
California League of Conservation Voters  
melissa@ecovote.org (916) 223-5894

Chuck Mills  
Director, Public Policy and Grants  
California Releaf  
cmills@californiareleaf.org (916) 798-6075

Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller  
Northern California Senior Organizer  
California Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism  
JSaxe-Taller@rac.org

Baani Behniwal  
Policy Analyst  
Californians Against Waste

Brian Nowicki  
California Climate Policy Director  
Center for Biological Diversity

Christopher Chin  
Executive Director  
The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education (COARE)

Kevin Hamilton, RRT  
Co-Founder & Co-Director  
Central California Asthma Collaborative  
Kevin.hamilton@centralcalasthma.org (559) 272-4874

Nayamin Martinez, MPH  
Director  
Central California Environmental Justice Network  
nayamin.martinez@ccejn.org (559) 907-2047

Catherine Garoupa White  
Executive Director  
Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAQ)  
catherine@calcleanair.org (559) 232-1698

Jesus A. Alonso  
Kern Community Organizer  
Clean Water Action  
jalonso@cleanwater.org

Ellie M. Cohen  
CEO  
The Climate Center  
ellie@theclimatecenter.org

RL Miller  
Political Director  
Climate Hawks Vote

Cynthia Mahoney  
Co-Founder  
Climate Health Now

Bill Magavern  
Policy Director  
Coalition for Clean Air  
bill@ccair.org (916) 527-8051

Saul Ruiz  
President  
Comite Lost Hills en Accion

Jose Mireles  
President  
Comite Progreso de Lamont

Estela Escoto  
President  
Committee for a Better Arvin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title or Position</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anabel Marquez</td>
<td>President</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committee for a Better Shafter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahram Fazeli</td>
<td>Director of Research &amp; Policy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bfazeli@cbecal.org">bfazeli@cbecal.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communities for a Better Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analise Rivero</td>
<td>California Program Coordinator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:arivero@defenders.org">arivero@defenders.org</a> (916) 812-9193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Krill</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Earthworks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Jacobson</td>
<td>State Director</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment California</td>
<td><a href="mailto:djacobson@environmentcalifornia.org">djacobson@environmentcalifornia.org</a> (916) 446-8062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Takkvorian</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental Health Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy Emerson</td>
<td>Board President</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fossil Free California</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole Ghio</td>
<td>Senior Fossil Fuels Program Manager</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nghio@foe.org">nghio@foe.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends of the Earth U.S.</td>
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<td>Carmelita Kelly Miller</td>
<td>Director, Energy Equity</td>
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<td>The Greenlining Institute</td>
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<td>Emily Parker</td>
<td>Coastal and Marine Scientist</td>
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<td>Heal the Bay</td>
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<td>Carol Moon Goldberg</td>
<td>President</td>
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<td>League of Women Voters of California</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca August</td>
<td>Director of Advocacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Los Padres ForestWatch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin C. O’Brien</td>
<td>Staff Attorney</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cobrien@earthjustice.org">cobrien@earthjustice.org</a> (415) 217-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earthjustice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Martin Bourque</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<td>Ecology Center</td>
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<td>Linda Krop</td>
<td>Chief Counsel</td>
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<td>Environmental Defense Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Alayaud</td>
<td>California Director of Government Affairs</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bill@ewg.org">bill@ewg.org</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Environmental Working Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyle Ferrar</td>
<td>Western Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>FracTracker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jema Perez</td>
<td>President</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenfield Walking Group</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Henderson</td>
<td>Senior Climate Campaigner</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chenders@greenpeace.org">chenders@greenpeace.org</a> (603) 355-7039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenpeace USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Jordan</td>
<td>Policy Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Counsel for Justice &amp; Accountability</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jjordan@leadershipcounsel.org">jjordan@leadershipcounsel.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Shukla</td>
<td>Operations Director</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel Molina</td>
<td>CA State Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mi Familia Vota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sandy Naranjo  
California Organizing Manager  
Mothers Out Front  
sandy.naranjo@mothersoutfront.org

Dr. Rosanna Esparza  
Mural Arts | Environmental Justice Collaborative of Kern County  
Resparza.usc@gmail.com 626-215-9150

Victoria Rome  
Director of California Government Affairs  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
vrome@nrdc.org (415) 672-2813

David Krueger  
President  
Northern California Recycling Association

Martha Dina Arguello  
Executive Director  
Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles  
marguello@psr-la.org

Dianna Cohen  
Chief Executive Officer  
Plastic Pollution Coalition

David Braun  
Rootskeeper  
thedavidbraun@gmail.com 917-514-0700

Angela Mooney D’Arcy  
Sacred Places Institute  
a.mooneydarcy@gmail.com 310-678-1747

Elizabeth Chopp  
Co-chair, Legislative Committee  
San Diego 350  
beecee3@cox.net (619) 265-1577

Grace Feldmann  
Co-Founder/Co-Chair  
Santa Barbara Standing Rock Coalition

Katherine O'Dea  
Executive Director  
Save Our Shores

Vanessa Pope  
Co-Founder  
MudLab

Neal Desai  
Sr. Program Director, Pacific Region  
National Parks Conservation Association  
ndesai@npca.org (510) 368-0845

Arnold Sowell, Jr.  
Executive Director  
NextGen California

Rascha Hall  
President  
Palos Verdes Democrats

Matthew Baker  
Policy Director  
Planning & Conservation League  
matthew@pcl.org (916) 202-9093

Anne Kelsey Lamb  
Director  
Regional Asthma Management & Prevention / Community Action to Fight Asthma

Gabby Trejo  
Executive Director  
Sacramento Area Congregations Together

Rebecca August  
Founder and Chair  
Safe Energy Now! North Santa Barbara County

Ken Hough  
Executive Director  
Santa Barbara County Action Network

Pauline Seales  
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network / 350 Santa Cruz

Matt Pakucko  
President and Co Founder  
Save Porter Ranch
Regina Zweng  
Government Engagement Officer  
Science Policy Group at UCLA

Leslie Mintz Tamminen  
Director  
Seventh Generation Advisors

Jack Eidt  
Co-Founder/Steering Committee  
SoCal 350 Climate Action

Shoshana Wechsler  
Sunflower Alliance

Riddhi S. Patel  
Hub Coordinator  
Sunrise Kern County

Jennifer Savage  
California Policy Manager  
Surfrider Foundation

Miriam Gordon  
Program Director  
UPSTREAM

Evan Minton  
California State Policy & Programmatic Manager  
Voices for Progress  
eminton@voicesforprogress.org (925) 872-2250

Ruth Abbe  
President  
Zero Waste USA

Elizabeth Cuestas  
CEO  
Casa Familiar

Laura Walsh  
Policy Coordinator  
Surfrider San Diego

Gloria Medina  
Interim Executive Director  
SCOPE

Lauren Cullum  
Policy Advocate  
Sierra Club California  
lauren.cullum@sierraclub.org (916) 557-1107

Danielle Elliott, Alex Mesher, Sara Jaramillo  
Co-Leaders  
Students for Economic and Environmental Justice, Berkeley Law

Molly Morabito  
Political Team Lead  
Sunrise Bay Area  
mollymorabito@gmail.com (510) 409-5110

Nicole Levin  
Hub Coordinator  
Sunrise LA

Gerhard Brostrom  
President  
Transition Albany

Kobi Naseck  
Coalition Coordinator  
VISION Coalition  
kobi@vision-ca.org

Mati Waiya  
Executive Director  
Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation

Barbara Sattler, RN, DrPH, FAAN  
Board Member  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Kayla Owens  
Indivisible CA State Strong Liaison  
The Resistance Northridge-Indivisible

Cc: Assembly Member Muratsuchi  
Kip Lipper, Chief Policy Advisory for Energy and Environment, Pro Tem’s Office