



July 8, 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 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.⁴ 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,

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¹ Oil Change International, The Sky’s Limit California: Why the Paris Climate Goals Demand That California Lead in a Managed Decline of Oil Extraction (May 2018) at 21, <http://priceofoil.org/ca-skys-limit>

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

³ Tanja Srebotnjak and Miriam Rotkin-Ellman, “Drilling in California: Who’s at risk?” Natural Resources Defense Council, October 2014, at 4, available at <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/california-fracking-risks-report.pdf>

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>

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