



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, April 23rd, 2019

Media/Press Contacts:

Ingrid Brostrom, Assistant Director, Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment,
(510) 480-2329

Dr. Rosanna Esparza, ¡SALUD! Kern County, (626-215-9150) (bilingual
English/Spanish)

Lizette Hernandez, Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles, (323) 646-7300
(bilingual English/Spanish)

VISIÓN Advocates for a Future Free of Oil & Gas Extraction in Our Communities

SACRAMENTO, Calif.--Leading frontline environmental justice organizations announced a new coalition -- VISIÓN -- to advocate for safe and effective statewide policies to protect people from the impacts of drilling for oil and gas. Voices in Solidarity against Neighborhood Drilling (VISIÓN) is leading efforts in California for health and safety protections from oil and gas operations.

VISIÓN is also celebrating the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 345: Health and Safety Zones out of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee by a 7-3-1, with Committee members Al Muratsuchi, Laura Friedman, Monique Limón, Ed Chau, Kevin McCarty, Cristina Garcia, Mark Stone casting the “aye” votes, with Assembly member Susan Eggman abstaining and Devon Mathis, Heath Flora, and Melissa Melendez voting “no.” The bill, if enacted, would be a precedent-setting step toward protecting public health hundreds of thousands Californians living within 2,500 feet of an oil or gas well.

VISIÓN is led by groups organizing on the frontlines of oil extraction in California, working with communities in Kern and Los Angeles Counties directly impacted by oil and gas extraction. California is a leading oil producing state. Kern and Los Angeles Counties account for more than eighty percent of overall oil production in California, and thus bear the brunt of the safety risks and health impacts.

Studies link proximity to oil and gas wells to a host of health problems, including increased risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses, pre-term births and high-risk pregnancies, and in some cases, cancer. Oil and gas extraction produces toxic air contaminants. Other harms include water contamination, noise pollution, spills of toxic chemicals, and explosions. Substantial evidence shows that drilling and related wastewater disposal threaten groundwater and pollute drinking water. A safe distance between drilling operations and residences, schools, and other sensitive places is necessary to avoid these serious public health and safety risks. The California Council on Science and Technology’s (“CCST”) 2015 report on well stimulation in the state



recommended maintaining a safe distance between wells and residences, schools, hospitals and other sensitive places, but the state has yet to act on this recommendation.

“This bill will provide a health protection zone around oil and gas wells to help ensure the safety of thousands of Californians, mostly people of color, who live within one-half mile of an oil or gas well. Studies link proximity to these structures to a host of health impacts, including asthma and other respiratory ailments. This bill will help protect our most vulnerable residents who, by no fault of their own, are being exposed to toxins that are affecting their health,” said Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi, author of AB 345.

“My neighborhood was evacuated because of an issue with a nearby oil well. On top of ruining my property value, I didn't know how much it affected my everyday health until a 9-month evacuation made me pay attention to the impacts. I ask myself how many other people in California are living day-to-day not knowing whether their chronic issues are caused by the oil industry in their backyard?” shared Francisco Gonzales, who lives on Nelson Court in Arvin, Kern County. In 2014, Nelson Court was the site of major pipeline leak and the site poses an ongoing risk to local residents; Gonzalez was on the side of the street not evacuated when this major leak was detected. He now participates in community science projects and helped advocate for a city ordinance creating a health and safety buffer around new wells.

“We strongly support AB 345 because it will address the environmental racism that many communities across California are facing due to their proximity to oil and gas facilities that harm their health. Our local air monitoring efforts and site visits with Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) cameras have captured numerous leaks that are exposing people living, working, and playing nearby to dangerous levels of toxic air contaminants. Due to Kern County and local authorities favoritism of the oil industry, state action is long overdue to directly address the health harms and safety risks from oil and gas wells,” said Nayamín Martinez, Director of the Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN).

“California needs to show leadership in creating good policies that protect the health of communities near fossil fuel operations, and this health and safety buffer zone proposal is a real solution which also demonstrates that Sacramento cares about our communities,” said Ashley Hernandez a Youth Organizer with Communities for a Better Environment who lives across the street from Warren E&P, one of the largest drilling sites in Wilmington, in Los Angeles County.

“This is extraordinary news! Finally, I can feel like the kids, our future, and our quality of life will be a priority, instead of industry profits. Passing this bill will be a way to show kids in poverty that living with so much pollution isn't normal and that there are systems to protect them. In the end, the kids are our future,” said Anabel Marquez from Shafter, in Kern County. Anabel is the president of Committee for a Better Shafter and manages a community garden next to Sequoia Elementary School, where drill sites are in close proximity to the garden and school grounds.



“Every moment that we do not act, our most overburdened residents are paying the price with their health and quality of life,” stated Ingrid Brostrom with the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. “VISION is committed to the principle that frontline communities must speak for themselves and lead the fight toward more just and equitable climate and pollution prevention policies in California.”

“Oil and gas operations within this health and safety zone must be phased out of communities. In the words of our residents: ‘No drilling where we are living,’” shared Martha Dina Argüello, Executive Director for Physicians for Social Responsibility, Los Angeles (PSR-LA). “Our communities believe that closing these dangerous sites can be the impetus to make room for healthy land uses, ones that are health promoting and create real, sustainable economic opportunities for our neighborhoods,” Martha Dina Argüello stated.

Founding organizations and coalitions are:

Central California Asthma Collaborative (CCAC)

Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN)

Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment (CRPE)

Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAQ)

Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)

Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles (PSR-LA)

¡SALUD! Kern County

California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)

Californians Against Fracking and Dangerous Drilling (CAF)

###