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CONTACT

Severn Williams, 510-336-9566

Public Good PR

sev@publicgoodpr.com

Press Statement: Today is Public Comment Deadline for Kern Oil Ordinance

Grassroots coalition rallies residents in Kern County and across California to oppose massive oil and gas expansion

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. – Today marks the deadline for submitting public comments under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a Kern County ordinance that would fast-track the permitting of more than 67,000 new oil and gas wells. The ordinance would lead to a near doubling of the 78,000 wells already present in Kern County.

A February 2020 ruling by the Fifth District Court of Appeal, which struck down an earlier effort, found that the County failed to adequately disclose or mitigate the significant harms this ordinance would cause to the county's water, air and public health. Despite these failures, the County's new draft environmental impact report has few meaningful changes. The new version still does not require any meaningful environmental review or mitigation to protect vulnerable community members from the toxic pollution emitted from oil and gas extraction.

“This ordinance would be a disaster for public health in Kern County, particularly for low-income communities of color that live next to oil wells and are already harmed daily by fossil fuel pollution. This ordinance was proposed by the oil industry and only the oil industry stands to profit.” – Chelsea Tu, Senior Attorney at the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

“The last thing the people of Kern County need is yet more air and water pollution from fossil fuel development. More has to be done to protect Kern residents. I call on the Board of Supervisors to head the community's comments and concerns, and vote to reject this ordinance.” – Cesar Aguirre, Community Organizer in Kern County for the Central California Environmental Justice Network.

“California's droughts, heatwaves and fires have shown we are in a climate crisis, and we can't afford to drill any more wells in the state, let alone another 67,000. Our state and local officials should be leading a just transition, starting with a halt to new well permits, a health and safety setback to protect frontline communities, and a rapid phase out that includes a mandate for oil companies to plug dangerous oil and gas wells across the state.” – Hollin Kretzmann, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity.

"Kern County communities are already burdened with the worst air pollution in the country. The last thing we need is a massive expansion of oil and gas drilling that would further threaten our health and safety. A legitimate environmental impact report would have made clear that this

ordinance would be a disaster for Kern County. We urge the Board of Supervisors to go back to the drawing board on this proposal and enact policy that would protect communities, not polluters." – Mercedes Macias, Organizer for the Sierra Club.

Kern County already accounts for 80% of all oil and gas production in the state. Expanding oil and gas extraction in the county would cause devastating public health impacts. Numerous scientific studies show a direct link between oil and gas pollution and a wide range of serious adverse health impacts, including asthma, cancer, high-risk pregnancies and preterm births.

Low-income communities and communities of color already suffer pollution-related exposure and serious health problems at disproportionate levels, in Kern County and across the nation. Of the Californians who live within a mile of oil and gas wells and within areas most burdened by environmental pollution in general, nearly 92% are people of color.

Expanding oil and gas extraction would also harm the county's agriculture industry. Wells on farmland already pose a toxic threat to groundwater and soil, and many of the new wells would be drilled on prime farmland. Agriculture accounts for 63,700 local jobs and 18% of Kern County's economy.