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CONTACT: Severn Williams, 510-336-9566

Public Good PR, sev@publicgoodpr.com

Kern Community Leaders, Residents, and Allied Organizations Respond to Board Of Supervisors Vote to Greenlight Tens of Thousands of New Toxic Oil Wells

Groups now look to state legislature to prevent irreparable damage to Kern communities and climate

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. – March 8, 2021, the Kern Board of Supervisors voted to put the oil industry before the health and well-being of Kern communities by passing an ordinance that would add tens of thousands of new toxic wells over the next two decades, posing a grave threat to public health and causing irreversible environmental damage.

Expanding oil and gas drilling would be detrimental to public health, especially for vulnerable populations that already face numerous injustices, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, other communities of color and low-income communities, and particularly the children within these communities. For instance, [one in four children](#) in the southern Central Valley has asthma, one of the numerous chronic health conditions known to be linked to oil and gas production. In addition, studies published last year by Stanford University and the University of California link the correlation of low-birth weight and preterm birth impacts to proximity to oil wells.

Kern County has some of the most polluted air in the country, which is directly linked to extraction and burning of fossil fuels from the existing 78,000 oil and gas wells. County leaders have turned a blind eye to environmental impacts of oil and gas drilling, including water supply and air quality problems, farmland degradation, and increased noise -- all of which contribute to climate change while harming marginalized communities. From 2015-2019, for example, one study found that the permits issued under the 2015 version of the ordinance “were instituted in predominantly poor, linguistically isolated, Hispanic communities already suffering from existing environmental degradation,” resulting in these communities becoming “sacrifice zones.”

On March 5th, more than 120 organizations, including environmental justice, labor, public health and community-based groups, delivered a letter opposing this harmful ordinance. 7,300 people signed a petition calling on the Kern County Board of Supervisors to reject this ordinance. In addition, at today’s Board of Supervisors meeting, more than 250 people spoke in opposition to the ordinance.

Moving forward, Kern residents and allies will continue to rise up to call on state decision makers, namely state legislators and CalGEM, to right this wrong by passing and enacting policies to protect our communities and environments now and for the years to come:

- CalGEM, the state’s oil and gas regulator, is in the process of developing its first Public Health and Safety Rule and is expected to publish its initial discussion draft in April 2021. Advocates have been calling on CalGEM to establish protective setbacks of at least 2,500 feet from homes, hospitals, and schools against oil and gas extraction.
- SB 467 would prohibit all new or renewed permits for oil and gas extraction within 2,500 feet of any homes, schools, healthcare facilities, or long-term care institutions such as dormitories or prisons, by January 1, 2022.

- SB 467 would also halt the issuance or renewal of permits for dangerous drilling practices, including hydraulic fracturing (fracking), acid well stimulation treatments, cyclic steaming, and water and steam flooding starting January 1, 2022, and then prohibit these extraction methods entirely starting January 1, 2027.

In response to today's Board of Supervisors' vote, a coalition of Kern community leaders, residents, and social justice and environmental advocates offered the following statements:

"The Board of Supervisors' vote to pass this ordinance shows they are willing to turn a blind eye to the chronic health problems, disastrous environmental impacts, and disruptions to already disadvantaged communities of color that adding tens of thousands of new wells would create. It's inexcusable and shameful, but it's not the end of the road for this movement and our communities to push back. Together, we will work to make sure the legislature understands the gravity of this issue, and pass common sense legislation to right this wrong and get to work building a future here in Kern County that is free from drilling," **said Juan Flores, Community Organizer, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE).**

"Expanding oil and gas drilling not only is the wrong choice for the health of our neighbors and future of our communities - but it also demonstrates how our state is gravely failing to live up to its reputation as a progressive, innovative champion against climate change. Our Kern leaders should be focused on carving out bright and climate-safe futures for younger generations, not selling out to the oil industry. Make no mistake, we'll be calling on our legislators to pick up the Board of Supervisors' slack, meet the urgency of the climate crisis we face and pass SB 467," **said Elizabeth Perez, Community Organizer in Kern County, Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN).**

"The Board of Supervisors has made it abundantly clear that their priorities do not include the future of Kern County's economy nor the health of marginalized communities. We need our leaders to recognize this move will further delay Kern County's opportunity for a just transition. We should be prioritizing our region's environment and community's public health with a long-term focus on creating sustainable jobs. Unfortunately, with today's vote, our county leaders did not put Kern County first. They have disappointed our at-risk communities while ignoring their health concerns. Now, we look to our state legislators to pass SB 467 and put our communities and our environment where they should be: first," **said Bryan Osorio, Mayor, City of Delano.**

"Adding tens of thousands of new wells is decidedly not the way we build healthy, sustainable communities. The result of this vote isn't the outcome we hoped for, or the one that has the best interests of Kern residents at heart, but the fight is far from over. Now, we turn to our legislature and call on our legislators to pass SB 467 to stop this harmful ordinance from disrupting our communities, making us sick, and damaging our environment," **said Mercedes Macias, Senior Organizer in Kern County for the Sierra Club.**

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Additional Resources:

For more information, please visit <https://crpe-ej.org/stopkernoilordinance>.