

# CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL  
SACRAMENTO, CA  
95814

April 13, 2020

Mary Nichols, Chair  
California Air Resources Board  
1001 I Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Protecting Public Health During COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Chair Nichols and Members of the Board,

We want to applaud you for the work you all do to protect the public from the harmful effects of air pollution and battle the causes and impacts of climate change. We write you today to ask you at the Air Resources Board (ARB) to uphold your responsibilities to protect public health, especially in the face of mounting pressure to do otherwise.

As every sector of government responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unknowns multiply the difficulty of our work. We cannot know how long this will last, how many lives will be tragically lost, or what responses others will issue, but there are some things we do know. We know the pandemic has already caused massive death and suffering worldwide, and it is predicted to get even worse. We know there are dire challenges that require immediate response to save lives. We know COVID-19 attacks our airways – especially of those already stressed by health conditions like asthma, lung disease, and heart disease. We know that, alongside pandemic response, federal actions have already been taken to suspend or weaken existing environmental and emissions regulations. Importantly, we know that eventually, we will be able to return to something resembling normalcy. The decisions we make over these next, crucial days and weeks will shape the new normal to which we return. That is why we must ensure we do not backslide on our vital long-term public health goals.

Federal agencies have made it clear that they will continue to act on environmental regulations while they respond to COVID-19. As you know, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) announced it would allow industries to delay some regulatory

compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. While all workplaces will require some flexibility as many adapt to self-isolation and social distancing, it is easy to imagine this guidance being abused. Moreover, you are also aware that the USEPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) finalized their Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) Vehicles Rule. As USEPA/NHTSA themselves stated in the rule’s fact sheet, “This rule is the largest deregulatory initiative of this administration.” We thank you for your continued, tireless work to maintain strict vehicle emission standards. The estimated additional 867-923 million metric tons of CO2 that will be emitted under the new SAFE Rule as compared to the previous standards are extremely worrisome.

As we move forward, we must remain vigilant for the longer-term effects of our current public health and economic crises. The short-term impacts on emissions are obvious; as many of us self-isolate and minimize travel, we see cleaner air than we have in recent memory. However, the full extent of the consequences are still uncertain. We trust ARB to navigate the rippling impacts the pandemic will have on the state’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions goals. Undoubtedly, massive changes in the demand for oil and gas will affect markets both for fuels and for GHG emission allowances. We ask you keep us apprised as these situations develop. Working together, we are confident California will be able to maintain its leadership on climate policy in the coming decades, even as we recover from COVID-19.

The human tragedy of this pandemic has been unprecedented in its scale, but so has our state’s response. To quote Governor Newsom’s frequent call, we must meet this moment. At the federal level, the administration in Washington has made it clear that they will not pause their efforts to roll back hard-earned environmental protections. Despite this, we count on you to uphold your commitment to protecting Californians’ lungs. This is a uniquely challenging time, and we all must remain flexible and responsive while executing our important duties. Please continue to keep in touch as you decide how best to continue your vital work as you respond to COVID-19, and let us know if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



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Ben Allen, Senate District 26



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Mark Stone, Assembly District 29



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Hannah Beth Jackson, Senate District 19



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Marc Berman, Assembly District 24

Scott Wiener

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Scott Wiener, Senate District 11

Ash Kalra

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Ash Kalra, Assembly District 27

Richard Bloom

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Richard Bloom, Assembly District 50

Rob Bonta

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Rob Bonta, Assembly District 18

Nancy Skinner

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Nancy Skinner, Senate District 09

Al Muratsuchi

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Al Muratsuchi, Assembly District 66

Phil Ting

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Phil Ting, Assembly District 19

Henry Stern

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Henry Stern, Senate District 27

Monique Limón

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Monique Limón, Assembly District 37

cc: Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency  
Kate Gordon, Director, Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
Christine Hironaka, Office of the Governor  
Rachel Wagoner, Office of the Governor