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Air Resources Board Approves Program to Improve Air Quality in Disadvantaged Communities

Sacramento, CA | September 28, 2018 — Yesterday, the Air Resources Board (ARB) voted to approve its statewide plan for the AB 617 Community Air Protection Program and the 10 communities where community air monitoring and emission reduction programs will be developed with regional air districts in the first year of implementation. AB 617 was passed by the legislature in 2017 as the environmental justice and air quality consolation bill to justify extending cap and trade.

Over the past year, the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) has been pushing ARB to implement AB 617 with strong and equitable statewide standards. After a contentious fight and disappointment over cap and trade, EJ communities that CEJA member organizations work with have been deeply engaged in the implementation process of AB 617, submitting detailed comment letters and attending hearings and meetings.

CEJA pushed for ARB to provide clear and specific oversight and accountability mechanisms in the program to ensure swift emission reductions in communities, including baseline minimum requirements and health-based goals and metrics for community emission reduction plans, as well as a course of action to be taken if community emission reduction plans are not up to par.

“The Air Resources Board has taken some important first steps toward its legal mandate and moral duties to ensure that all California residents have clean, healthy air. The low-income communities and communities of color that we work with across the state are disproportionately impacted by the most polluted air in the nation and suffer severe health impacts. This program is a step in the right direction, although much remains to be done, including adoption of enforceable reduction measures. We will continue to keep the pressure on ARB and local air regulators to fulfil the letter and spirit of our laws and hold polluters accountable for making our communities sick.”

— **Gladys Limon, Executive Director of the California Environmental Justice Alliance**

ARB discussed and moved forward with a few steps in this direction, but much more is needed to address the severe air pollution and health impacts in EJ communities. With the adopted plan, community residents will have a role in developing community emission reduction plans, but they still face an uphill battle and a serious imbalance of power and resources in pushing regulators to curb emissions from industrial polluters. CEJA is disappointed that ARB did not express willingness or interest in directly regulating some of the biggest known sources of pollution in California, including oil and gas wells and pesticides.

“In the South Coast, we are faced with some of the worst air in the nation. We faced 87 days straight of bad ozone pollution — resulting in emergency room visits for Inland Valley families. Our communities cannot continue to face the brunt of health burdens, as polluters continue to escape with minimal consequences. Air regulators must understand that nothing short of zero emissions will clean up our

community's air. It will take stern and decisive leadership from local and state air regulators to demand polluters to clean up their act."

— Allen Hernandez, Executive Director of Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

The Board heard testimony from dozens of community residents who expressed their frustration about the selection of communities for the first year of community emission reduction and air monitoring plans. Throughout the past year of advocacy on the program, CEJA has been critical of the lack of transparency, clarity, and objectivity in the community selection process and has urged ARB to avoid creating divisive competition among communities.

"Low income communities of color such as those in East Oakland, Richmond, Southeast LA, and Wilmington suffer from cumulative impacts of pollution from a wide range of mobile and stationary sources, such as oil refineries, oil drilling, freeways, diesel trucks, ports, metal processing, and even an industrial crematorium. Our communities have been neglected by regulatory agencies for decades, and we demand and deserve a more rigorous plan with enhanced transparency, accountability and verifiable emission reduction plans. We will continue to work with ARB to ensure meaningful and significant emission reductions in our communities."

— Darryl Molina Sarmiento, Executive Director of Communities for a Better Environment

Now that the program plan and first year communities have been approved, regional air districts must work with the 10 selected communities to develop air monitoring and emission reduction plans, which must be approved by ARB by October 1, 2019. CEJA remains committed to working with ARB and air districts to implement the program with the strongest possible metrics and tools to support communities in their fight for clean air.

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California Environmental Justice Alliance is a statewide, community-led alliance that works to achieve environmental justice by advancing policy solutions. We unite the powerful local organizing of our members in the communities most impacted by environmental hazards – low-income communities and communities of color - to create comprehensive opportunities for change at a statewide level. We build the power of communities across California to create policies that will alleviate poverty and pollution. Together, we are growing the statewide movement for environmental health and social justice.

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