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GOVERNOR NEWSOM VETOES ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE BILL IN THE MIDDLE OF A CLIMATE HEALTH EMERGENCY

Assembly Bill 995 would have enacted a board as a step towards reforming the Department of Toxic Substances Control

Sacramento, CA — Today, a broad coalition of environmental justice advocacy organizations expressed frustration with the Governor's veto of Assembly Bill 995 (Garcia), a key reform bill that for the first time would have created a board over the state's top toxics regulator—the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). The DTSC has been under fire in recent years for rampant regulatory failures and mismanagement, including over the Exide battery smelter, considered one of the worst cases of environmental racism in the country. The DTSC, with a standing deficit of nearly \$30 million, is the only regulatory and permitting agency at the California EPA without an oversight board.

The reform bill, AB 995, would have closed two-thirds of DTSC's deficit and ensured more accountability and transparency by creating a Board of Environmental Safety as the priority-setting body for DTSC. The Board would have provided oversight to DTSC and consisted of five members appointed by the Governor, two of which would be State Senate and State Assembly who possessed qualifications in environmental law, cumulative impacts, public health, regulatory permitting and science. As uncovered by a State Auditor, without an oversight body, DTSC failed to collect nearly \$200 million in costs for oversight of toxic cleanups, and numerous hazardous waste facilities were operating with expired permits, in some cases emitting dangerous pollutants and carcinogens that endangered residents' lives.

Martha Dina Arguello, **Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles**, stated that the DTSC reform bill was "a top priority bill because the health and safety of residents are being jeopardized without proper oversight and accountability to protect them from toxic exposure." Recent studies have shown a disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths in communities with high air pollution and resulting compromised respiratory and overall health. Similarly, the current wildfires have exacerbated already poor air quality in the most vulnerable communities.

“After years of warning, DTSC is now insolvent. Without funding for clean-ups, enforcement, and hazardous waste facility inspections, vulnerable populations are at even higher risk of toxic exposures. In light of the multiple health threats facing our communities, it is simply unconscionable for the Governor to veto AB 995, especially without an alternative plan to keep the Department running. The state can’t afford to walk away now. Our communities are paying too high a price for California’s continued inaction.”

—**Ingrid Brostrom, Assistant Director, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment**

“Environmental justice communities are tired of bearing the burden of California’s toxic waste dumping grounds. CEJA Action is deeply disappointed that the Governor vetoed AB 995. AB 995 was a unique bipartisan solution to clean up decades of toxic waste and bring \$21 million in from corporate polluters. Our undocumented, low income, working class, and Black Indigenous and communities of color have waited long enough for action from our leaders. In 2021, any climate, public health agenda that claims to be progressive for California must include reforms to the Department of Toxic Substances Control.”

— **Katie Valenzuela, Policy and Political Director, CEJA Action**

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