

Chair Nichols and Members of the Board
California Air Resources Board
1001 "I" Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Agenda Item No. 18-7-3: Assembly Bill 617 Community Air Protection Program –
Community Selection and Program Requirements**

Dear Chair Nichols and Members of the California Air Resources Board (CARB):

On behalf of New Voices are Rising (NVR) and Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP), we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Community Air Protection Program (the Program) to help ensure that its air quality improvements are as strong as possible in the communities that need them the most.

NVR seeks to increase civic participation within under-represented communities, increase young people's commitment to environmental justice, and reduce air and water pollution that severely impact both human health and the health of the San Francisco Bay. The program helps young people gain the skills and experience in civic engagement that they need to begin to tackle the problems – including environmental health problems – that disproportionately impact their communities. RAMP's mission is to reduce the burden of asthma in disproportionately impacted communities. RAMP promotes a variety of strategies – including reducing air pollution – to foster healthy communities where asthma is reduced and well-managed, and the social and environmental inequities that contribute to the unequal burden of the disease are eliminated.

Community Selection

Per CARB's *2018 Community Recommendations Staff Report*, both West Oakland and Richmond are recommended for developing an Emissions Reduction Program and conducting additional air monitoring, respectively. Given the pollution burden of these communities, as well as the elevated health burdens related to pollution exposure (e.g., asthma), we wholeheartedly support the selection of these two communities.

Additionally, as the *Staff Report* notes, "there are a number of communities that are a high priority for consideration in subsequent years of the Program." The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's *San Francisco Bay Area Community Health Protection Program: Improving Neighborhood Air Quality – Final Submittal: Public Process for Determination of Recommended Communities* specific names five additional communities including: East Oakland/San Leandro, Eastern San Francisco, Pittsburg-Bay Point, San Jose and Vallejo. We fully support prioritizing these communities for Program-related work given the inequitable burden of pollution present. Additionally, communities such as East Oakland/San Leandro (among others) benefit from strong resident involvement, including youth. Such involvement will make Program activities stronger and more beneficial.

While we appreciate the challenges with implementing the Program in multiple locations, and understand how the “phased-in” structure of the Program tries to accommodate those challenges, we also can’t forget that inequitably burdened communities need pollution reductions now. Program implementation needs to move forward as aggressively as possible; formally engaging only two per year is far too slow given community need. With that in mind, we appreciate that the *Staff Report* notes that “CARB will continue working with the air districts to provide resources, engage with these [beyond year one] communities, and identify opportunities to provide near-term benefits.” That’s a good start, but more is needed. Specifically, CARB and air districts should use their leadership to push for more state resources so that the Program can formally and effectively address many more communities than currently anticipated in subsequent years.

Final Draft Blueprint

Regarding the *Final Draft Blueprint*, we want to focus on two issues that are particularly concerning for some of the San Francisco Bay Areas in which we work, and that also have applicability to other parts of the state.

Land Use Issues

As noted in CARB’s *Summary of Comments – Community Air Protection Program* (<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/summary-comments-community-air-protection-program>), “AB 617 provided no new land use authority to CARB or the air districts.” This is a serious gap in the Program, which to its credit CARB tries address: the *Blueprint*, for example, notes the importance of engaging local land use decision-makers in the development of Emissions Reduction Programs, and CARB’s development of land use recommendations and tools will surely help. Still, poor land use planning at a local level is potentially one of the Program’s more significant “Achilles heels” that threaten to undermine air quality progress made elsewhere. Per the *Blueprint*: “As part of providing greater focus on reducing local exposure, CARB will also be considering how land use patterns and proximity to sensitive receptors and more targeted geographic approaches can be incorporated into State and air district regulatory strategies.” We encourage CARB to move as aggressively as possible to incorporate such “geographic approaches” into its regulatory processes and, as an interim measure, to provide clear and substantial guidance to city and county agencies with authority over land-use with the goal of preventing land-use decisions that increase pollution burdens or place vulnerable community members at risk.

Emissions Reductions

One of the long-standing critiques of the Program (including when the original bill, AB 617, was first debated) is that it would not result in real and substantial pollution reductions in overburdened communities. Reviewing the *Blueprint*, we are encouraged by CARB’s commitment to ensuring that the reductions are indeed real: “To provide concrete metrics to track implementation, each community emissions reduction program will include specific outcomes associated with deployment of clean technologies, compliance with regulations, and

reducing exposure due to proximity to air pollution sources, which will inform the emissions reduction targets required by AB 617 and proximity-based goals.”

We are, however, still concerned about the degree to which substantial pollution reductions will be achieved. Absent specific emission reduction targets, any level of emission reduction, no matter how small, may end up technically satisfying all of the components of an Emissions Reduction Program while doing very little to reduce pollution in inequitably burdened communities. As such, CARB serves as a critical “backstop” given its authority to approve, conditionally approve, partially approve or reject a local Emission Reduction Program. CARB should always push the Emission Reduction Programs to reduce pollution as much as possible. While the *Blueprint* notes “CARB is committed to working closely with the air districts and the community steering committees throughout community emissions reduction program development to expedite the review process,” any expeditious review should not come at the expense of determining and requiring that Emission Reduction Programs are as beneficial as possible.

Overall Reflections on Community Engagement

AB 617 and the *Blueprint* recognize that effective solutions to community air quality and health problems must incorporate the knowledge and expertise of the people who live, work and study in California communities that are most affected by pollution. We strongly support the creation of community steering committees as an important step toward community engagement. We also would underscore the importance of ensuring that those community bodies have real power to develop and approve or reject plans. Furthermore, to maximize the effectiveness of the steering committees in engaging the broader community, we urge that meetings be as open and community-friendly as possible, taking place when other community members can attend, and providing food and childcare so that community members are able to come directly from work and are able to take the time to participate in the context of the demands of family and the many other demands on their time

In addition, community engagement must go beyond the creation of steering committees to ensure that there are opportunities for engagement for community members who are newer to air quality issues. This will require expanding the approach to community engagement to include meeting with community members in settings where they already gather, such as schools, PTA meetings, health clinics, etc.

We also wish to underscore the importance of encouraging youth participation in all community engagement activities. Young people bring important perspectives to the discussion, and are the ones with the most to gain or lose. The willingness of today’s youth to embrace proposed solutions will be critical to the long-term success of AB 617 implementation.

Beyond expanding the settings for community engagement, it is vital that in any community engagement setting, members of the public are listened to and treated with respect – by workshop facilitators, hearing officers, Air District and CARB staff and even – and possibly most important – by members of the agencies’ governing boards. This is particularly an issue when

community members who are new to the process – particularly when those community members are people of color or youth -- seek to participate in policy making. All too often, instead of being welcomed, they are ignored, dismissed, or told that their concerns are not relevant. AB 617 will not be able to deliver on its promises of a more just California unless members of the communities most burdened by pollution are respectfully engaged.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Community Air Protection Program.

Sincerely,

Jill Ratner and Carlos Zambrano
Co-Directors
New Voices are Rising

Joel Ervice
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