



January 21, 2022

Honorable Chair Liane Randolph
Honorable Board Members
California Air Resources Board
1001 "I" Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: 2022 Scoping Plan Update – Advance Energy Justice and Democracy in Building Decarbonization

Dear Chair Randolph and Members of the California Air Resources Board,

The undersigned organizations thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding building decarbonization in the 2022 Scoping Plan Update as presented at CARB's public workshop on December 13, 2021.

We are environmental justice and equity groups working to ensure that lower-income people and people of color in California can access affordable housing, avoid displacement, achieve health equity, benefit from California's clean energy transition, and have a meaningful voice in decisions that impact them. Despite the positive intentions of many policymakers and advocates, we feel that California is missing a critical lens of energy justice in decisions that will impact the very people we hope will benefit from our work the most. Our work is informed by

the deep local work and expertise cultivated for years by our members, with the goal of sharing best practices between communities and elevating those best practices to inform statewide investments and decision making. We acknowledge that the climate crisis is fundamentally a justice issue: low-income communities and Black, Indigenous and communities of color are both first and worst impacted by the climate crisis, and are also least responsible for causing the crisis. The only effective approach forward to address the climate crisis is to advance climate equity and justice, by prioritizing investment dollars and the economic, social, health and environmental benefits from state and local climate action to frontline and environmental justice communities, first.

A number of the undersigned organizations with the Building Energy, Equity and Power (BEEP) coalition are currently conducting statewide listening sessions in the Central Valley, Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Eastern Coachella Valley with the goal of creating statewide recommendations to inform the building decarbonization section of the Scoping Plan. Until those recommendations are finalized, we would like to offer the following recommendations to CARB:

1. Adopt key energy, housing, and labor justice principles for building decarbonization into policymaking and implementation.

Without a comprehensive, community-driven approach, the proposed solutions will inevitably lead to unintended consequences for the most vulnerable communities. We have seen this happen with solar and EV programs, which have provided lower, more stable energy costs for wealthier early adopters, leaving low-income communities with the burdens of higher costs and worse air quality. We have also seen this with the push for building decarbonization that only addresses the “low-hanging fruit” which will exacerbate current disparities. The key principles of energy, housing, and labor justice for building decarbonization are listed below, and in more detail in *“Achieving Energy Justice & Real Climate Solutions in California: Principles for Equitable Policymaking”* below.

- The first priority must be keeping power on and keeping people housed.
- A just transition will provide “high road” jobs and meet basic needs.
- Equitable policy means all ratepayers benefit.
- Energy is a public good.
- Understanding the urgency of the public health and climate crisis - we must not rush to false solutions.
- Cost impacts must be analyzed at a more nuanced level, and solutions must not have regressive impacts.
- There is no “one size fits all” or “low hanging fruit” solution.
- Energy policy must be informed and led by community experts and community organizers who are paid to do that critical work.

- Make space for building allies and unity.
- No “sacrifice zones” - we must be intentional about benefits and burdens.
- The goal is resilient communities and energy systems.

2. Provide sufficient resources to co-design a robust set of building decarbonization equity metrics, goals, requirements with environmental justice, labor, and tenant organizations to track equity outcomes from statewide and local building decarbonization efforts.

In order for the co-design effort to be successful and holistic, CARB must aim to minimize the burden on the EJAC and participatory organizations. CARB should designate resources to designing equitable building decarbonization metrics, goals, and requirements. Most importantly, CARB should actively source for inputs for the EJ, labor, and tenant organizations to ensure equity is the driving force of the policymaking process.

CARB must also recognize that equity-driven policy requires technical education, community engagement, and capacity from community organizations. CARB must provide participating stakeholders a reasonable timeline and resources (refer to the next recommendation).

3. Allocate funding for participatory, community-based and ground-truthed research on the effects of building decarbonization on vulnerable communities.

Very little research has been done on the unintended consequences of decarbonization, which is why community-based groups are rightfully concerned about what this climate effort could mean for the people our organizations represent and serve. Similarly, community engagement efforts only began in the last one or two years.

In order to better understand the unintended consequences of building decarbonization, CARB must establish sizable funding dedicated to research and community engagement. As a poignant example, in 2021, CARB reached out to community organizations to collaborate on hosting a listening session for building decarbonization. The agency proposed to provide \$10,000-\$15,000 for this effort and requested the work to be completed within two months. Community engagement is a slow, expensive, but necessary process. Although originated with a good intention, CARB’s structure of community engagement funding immensely undervalued this work, placed the burdens on the community organizations to finance the work in a rush, and furthered community mistrust of the agency.

Eight community organizations in California stepped up to form the Building Energy, Equity, and Power (BEEP) Coalition, raising six-figure funding to organize five regional listening sessions (two in the Central Valley, one in the San Francisco Bay Area, one in Los Angeles and one in Eastern Coachella Valley). This work is taking approximately five months to plan, coordinate, execute, and synthesize – at least 3 months longer than CARB’s requested timeline.

This is the first step towards enabling frontline communities' participation in building decarbonization. We estimate that this work for building decarbonization alone will span over a few years and cost millions of dollars. We call for CARB to be advanced/patient with the deadlines and establish seven-figure funding going towards equitable community engagement and participatory, community-based and ground-truthed research for building decarbonization (similarly for other sector categories included in the Scoping Plan).

4. Include results and recommendations from the BEEP coalition's building decarbonization community listening sessions (San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Central Valley, and Eastern Coachella Valley) in the Scoping Plan itself, rather than as an appendix.

As mentioned in Recommendation #3, the Building Energy, Equity & Power (BEEP) coalition is organizing five listening sessions in the Central Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles and Eastern Coachella Valley on building decarbonization. We will hear the concerns, needs and priorities of hundreds of leaders and members of vulnerable, frontline communities. This is the first sizable community engagement effort on building decarbonization in California that we are familiar with.

The coalition will synthesize a report early in the second quarter of 2022. We were informed by the CARB team that this report could go into the Appendix of the Scoping Plan. CARB should integrate the findings of this report (and this comment letter) into the Scoping Plan's building decarbonization section itself, not just attach it as an Appendix. Equity must be the driving force of climate policymaking.

5. Align statewide Building Decarbonization policy making with the timeline of local jurisdictions' community engagement efforts by extending the Scoping Plan timeline to June 2023.

We support members of the AB 32 Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC) in their unanimous demand to extend the Scoping Plan timeline beyond 2022 to June 2023, to enable more equitable and accessible community engagement processes.¹ This should also enable local jurisdictions' community engagement efforts across California to inform EJAC's recommendations to CARB and the Scoping Plan generally.

Sincerely,

Martha Dina Argüello
Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles

¹ [October 13, 2021 RE: Request to Extend Deadline for the 2022 Climate Change Scoping Plan Update](#)

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Achieving Energy Justice & Real Climate Solutions in California: Principles for Equitable Policymaking

Finalized June 18, 2021

California climate policy has put the needs of lower-income communities and communities of color on the “back burner” for decades. Our state has made progress toward the emission targets through piecemeal approaches, incentives, and focusing on new developments. By avoiding the hard conversations about environmental justice, however, California has also missed out on all of the benefits an environmental and economic transformation led by impacted communities could bring. No where is that missed opportunity more apparent than in building decarbonization work.

By focusing on technology over people, on small wins versus transformational vision, on piecemeal approaches over integrated solutions, the building decarbonization work in California is a foreboding tale of how avoiding conversations about justice can frustrate advocacy campaigns. Campaigns for all-electric building standards have faltered, not because decarbonization is not a laudable goal - but because the campaigns had the fatal flaw of leaving behind the very communities whose voices could have made a difference in the solutions lifted up and the effectiveness of the strategy.

Our organizations work to help lower-income people and people of color in California access affordable housing, prevent displacement, achieve health equity, benefit from California’s clean energy transition, and have a meaningful voice in decisions that will impact them. Despite the positive intentions of many policymakers and advocates, we feel that California is missing a critical lens of **ENERGY JUSTICE** in decisions that will impact the very people we hope will benefit from our work the most. Our work will continue to falter if we do not step back and address equity and justice.

In the interest of helping inform meaningful policy moving forward, we have come together to outline the following principles for equitable decision-making:.

- **The first priority must be keeping power on and keeping people housed.** Millions of Californians are facing the uncertainty of power shut offs due to failure to pay part or all of their bills during the COVID-19 pandemic, and millions more may be at risk of shut offs if we increase costs beyond what they can afford. Any policy affecting energy must be centered on ensuring electricity service stays on for residential ratepayers, and that any potential costs for the clean energy transition can be offset by incentives or other programs. We must also recognize and mitigate the potential for energy policies to further displacement for populations at-risk of losing housing, or of negatively impacting the affordability and availability of housing moving forward.
- **A just transition will provide “High Road” jobs and meet basic needs.** Working for energy justice also means building high road jobs and opening up sustainable jobs for minority, women and people of color contractors and workers. In addition, pursuing energy justice means incorporating the needs of labor and the working class to build a transition that meets all people’s basic needs.
- **Equitable policy means all ratepayers benefit.** Pursuing policies that address the concerns of those most vulnerable to negative impacts, and with the highest barriers to adoption, will ensure everyone benefits. We cannot call a policy equitable that fails to do anything to help the ratepayers who need it the most.
- **Energy is a public good.** Energy justice for all requires that energy and the systems that create and distribute energy are a public good, democratized at all levels and not market driven.
- **Understanding the urgency of the public health and climate crisis - we must not rush to false solutions.** Communities that are most at risk of climate impacts are already impacted by systemic racism and disinvestment. Any work to confront the climate or public health crisis must center their needs - which sometimes means investing more time in designing policy and planning for programs in order to facilitate smooth implementation. While it seems counterintuitive, taking time for meaningful community engagement will lead to us more rapidly achieving our goals by identifying intersectional solutions that help reduce emissions more rapidly, increasing rates of adoption, preemptively identifying and planning for barriers, and building a broader base of community support for advocacy efforts.
- **Cost impacts must be analyzed at a more nuanced level, and solutions must not have regressive impacts.** Many cost impact studies are aggregated, or focus on a “typical” customer. For example, many building decarbonization studies claim that residential rates will go down, however fail to account for ratepayers who currently do not use gas for all current appliances because they do not own those appliances or use other fuel sources to power them, or fail to account for the dynamics of funding affordable housing developments. In order to inform equitable decisions, any cost impact studies must center the ratepayers that are lowest income to ensure we fully understand how decisions will impact them, and analyses must reflect how people are living in their homes now. Further, solutions must not regressively impact lower-income people, who have relatively low per

capita emissions impacts, either through direct costs or costs passed through to ratepayers through implementation.

- **There is no “one size fits all” or “low hanging fruit” solution.** The current state of housing and energy delivery varies significantly region-by-region, and even within communities. What will work for one household in one community may not work for a similar household in another community. Equitable energy policies must follow the lead of community leaders and allow for variation based on local needs. Even policies that only focus on new buildings have fatal flaws that will negatively impact lower-income communities and workers without a change in course.
- **Energy policy must be informed and led by community experts and community organizers who are paid to do that critical work.** The people currently working to address challenges in communities are the experts on how to best design a policy that will help - and not harm - the communities we intend to benefit. Bringing in those community experts early to inform any policy direction or resources allocation will ensure that our work is as strategic and far-reaching as possible. We must recognize the loss of trust among communities who have continued to be left behind and harmed by policymakers, agencies, utilities, and advocates for decades. Organizing amongst lower-income people of color is a crucial component to energy justice and if resourced well, will catapult the transition to a just, meaningful, and sustainable solution. Giving space for this work requires time and flexibility, and - above all - meaningful resources for the groups managing the critical community engagement processes.
- **Make space for building allies and unity.** The infrastructure and systemic transition we are undertaking is large in scale. To meet this scope and speed of change, we understand the need and opportunity to build allies and unity across sectors and movements under the leadership of lower-income people and communities of color. Resourcing ally and unity building efforts is crucial.
- **No Sacrifice Zones - be intentional about benefits and burdens.** Energy justice means that no group of people are sacrificed for Californian’s access to energy and minimum harm is done to the environment. This means communities seeking justice in California also see their role as working for mining democracy, and an end to the enslavement of children or any people for mining of minerals needed to create renewable energy.
- **The goal is resilient communities and energy systems.** This means pursuing integrated solutions that focus on improving public health by reducing air pollution and exposure to toxics while also generating clean energy. This also means investing in an energy system that will not sacrifice public safety through wildfires and power shut-offs, and prepares our communities for the impacts of climate change.