



Subject: 2021 AB 617 Communities

To whom it may concern:

My name is Sarai Parker, I am a sophomore at Coliseum College Prep Academy and I am the New Voice are Rising East Oakland Air Quality Fellow. As the East Oakland Air Quality Fellow, I inform my community and key decision-makers about the importance of better air quality in low-income communities of color. I am passionate about working toward sustainable solutions to address this grave environmental injustice that has only been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I urge you to designate East Oakland as a AB 617 community for this year.

East Oakland experiences air quality issues brought forth by its close proximity to polluting industries, busy freeways, and diesel trucks. Freeways like I-880 and I-580 are hot spots for hazardous emissions such as oxides of nitrogen and diesel particulate matter as well as climate-change forcing black carbon and carbon dioxide. When exposed to these pollutants, people are in danger of their throat tissues swelling up, bronchitis and hyperpnea to name a few. As for diesel trucks, the routes of the diesel trucks go through the East Oakland community and the diesel exhaust or the black smoke has chemicals inside of it that can do things like harm the reproductive system. The AB&I Foundry is known for emitting toxins like these into the air. "Neighboring residents complain of strong foul odors from the foundry and describe common symptoms including headaches and eye, nose, and throat irritation..." (East Bay Express, October 29, 2019).

Existing rules and their enforcement by the air district are not very stringent, rendering the wellbeing of people unsafe. The designation of East Oakland as the AB 617 priority community could make a major difference. As someone who recently lived in East Oakland and still goes to school in East Oakland at Coliseum College Prep Academy in the 94621 zip code, I can testify that the air quality is not the best and impacts our breathing. Using CalEnviroScreen 3.0 I looked at the zip code, 94621, and noticed that it has the highest pollution compared to its counterparts. The particulate matter 2.5 as well as hazardous waste levels are extremely high in the 94621 community. When looking at the main people who live in East Oakland, it's evident that the people who live there are low-income people of color. This includes people who live inside homes as well as the high population of unhoused community members. Most of the people of color living in East Oakland either do not have access to health care or their health care is

substandard. This puts the community of 94621 at a much higher risk of serious illness and even death from pollution-related diseases compared to the wealthy white people living in the surrounding Oakland/Berkeley hills. This also puts them at risk for a lower life expectancy--roughly 11-12 years. Wealthy residents living in the Oakland hills or in other areas with clean air should expect better health and longer lives.

With the many air quality issues and the recent issues with the COVID-19 virus there are many hardships facing the community of East Oakland. The air quality in East Oakland makes matters worse for people with respiratory problems, contributing to more severe asthma attacks, pneumonia, or other urgent lung diseases. COVID-19 adds on to that, because it's a respiratory disease. Even if an individual does not have prior respiratory problems, having bad air quality with the impacts of COVID-19 can create respiratory problems. If a person with respiratory problems is elderly they are even more prone to COVID-19 and the impact of the air quality could lead to bad health outcomes especially for the ones who are already ill. Between being in a low-income community and experiencing violence within that community, the individuals' life spans are already shortened by a great amount and having inadequate air quality shortens their life expectancy as well.

During this time people haven't been able to provide for their families or for themselves because of the virus but everyday more and more people are going back to work. This puts them more at risk for getting COVID-19 and even if the individual is wearing a mask to protect themselves from COVID, masks don't reduce the long-term effects on the heart and blood vessels when exposed to air pollution.

Recently, I conducted a survey at my highschool to explore the students' understanding of the air quality around them and its impact on their community. And a few things stood out to me from the results. Out of 161 respondents:

- **110** people do not know or are unsure of the status of their air quality. This stood out to me because that means people are unaware and uninformed about the detrimental impacts of the air quality in their community.
- Another thing that caught my attention about the results are the improvements that the people in the community think can be done to improve the air quality in their community. **49** people think that there should be stronger regulations and enforcements for polluters in the community.
- **61** people think that cars and trucks should start moving away from fossil fuels.

If East Oakland is designated as an AB 617 community, there will be a variety of benefits. For example, the life expectancy for the individuals in the community could increase and the negative impacts on people with respiratory problems could decrease. My classmates, community members and I have some strong ideas or policies that we think could help and we

also think that current policies should be enforced. We would be eager to contribute these suggestions as part of the AB 617 planning process.

Nevertheless, even if East Oakland is not made a designated community for AB 617, perhaps a few of our recommendations on how to reduce the impacts of poor air quality can be implemented. This includes providing air purifiers or air filtration systems to residents who are exposed to pollution on a daily basis. People in the affluent Bay region have started purchasing air filters to deal with wildfire smoke—but for low-income residents, air filters too often seem like luxury—leaving poorer residents' wellbeing at risk all the time—and much more at risk throughout wildfire smoke incidents. If nothing is done to help the East Oakland community, people in East Oakland may feel a sense of panic when they realize that East Oakland could have been prioritized but wasn't -- especially given the rising COVID 19 case numbers in East Oakland which reveal that there are 9,827.5 to 11,668.3 COVID 19 cases per 100,00 in the East Oakland zip codes. And -- beyond the impacts on the nearby community, pollution in East Oakland hurts the earth by adding to the greenhouse gas burden and accelerating global warming.

For these reasons, I urge you to appoint East Oakland as an AB 617 community.

Sincerely,

Sarai Parker