

June 21, 2017

Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Human Impact Partners, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recent revised version of *Safeguarding California 2017*. Our changing climate is a public health crisis. While climate change is far-reaching and will impact everyone, low-income communities and people of color disproportionately suffer from the impacts of climate change and in greater ways than other communities.

Human Impact Partners is based in Oakland, CA. Through research, advocacy, and capacity building, we help organizations and public agencies who work with low-income communities and communities of color understand the effects of current or proposed projects and policies on community health. We are one of the few organizations in the U.S. conducting health-based analyses with an explicit focus on uncovering and then addressing the policies and practices that make communities less healthy and create health inequities. Since our ultimate goal is transforming the policies and places people need to live healthy lives, we are compelled to participate in this public process regarding the revision of *Safeguarding California*.

Overview

Generations of economic disinvestment, unjust land use practices, and inequitable transportation planning have made vulnerable communities far less equipped to handle the most serious repercussions of climate change. For instance, as climate change drives up the cost of electricity, water, and food, low-income and communities of color often lack economic flexibility to absorb these rising costs. Extreme temperatures and weather from climate change pose a severe danger in a natural disaster and will exacerbate chronic health conditions that inadequate neighborhood design furthers. Without action, climate change will result in serious health repercussions, including more heat-related disorders, food insecurity, and mental health conditions, and continued disparate impacts on low-income and communities of color. If California is going to make a meaningful impact towards increasing the resilience of communities, particularly those who will be most impacted by climate change, then these communities need to be at the center of our efforts. Below are several recommendations to help strengthen this, and future, reports to help improve community resilience in the face of climate change:

Recommendations

Improve community engagement processes by reaching out to community first. Too often state agencies develop reports and recommendations before asking the community their needs and solutions, which is often counterproductive and could result in harmful recommendations rather than improvements in health. Therefore, state agencies must **START** with a community engagement process by talking with community residents first to understand their needs,

concerns, and ideas. Then, with these concerns and issues in mind, develop recommendations for community review and approval. In addition, this report should define and provides examples of what “community” is. For example, some populations were mentioned very little if at all in *Safeguarding California 2017*, such as the prison population, disabled or elderly communities, and schools. These definitions should be developed in concert with community leaders working on climate justice and health equity issues.

Ensure proper compensation for community input. Community members are experts in their own right. They understand and have solutions for how climate change will impact their lives, yet they are often not given the respect or recognition they deserve. Moving forward, the state should offer compensation for community participation in meetings or other input sessions. In addition, the state should include requirements for future grant or contract opportunities to include working with community based organizations, community residents, or other community engagement activities to ensure that those most impacted are better engaged in this process. Finally, true community participatory research (run by community) should be prioritized and justly compensated to help improve the data available and better inform recommendations.

Make future resources contingent upon implementing this report. While this report itself does not have resources attached to its goals and policies, billions of dollars are provided for the implementation of state and local projects for housing, development, transportation, and other infrastructure projects every year. Yet, at times, these projects are not tied to climate adaptation projects or goals. Therefore, moving forward, we must ensure that our state adaptation goals are also tied to the resources provided for infrastructure development and improvement, with an emphasis on targeting the needs of vulnerable communities and identifying specific funding for community efforts. In addition, agencies should not fund projects that may result in extreme harm to vulnerable communities; they must find ways to reduce harm such as including adaptive management strategies. The adverse impacts review process should be integrated into the policy planning process.

Strengthen transparency and accountability processes to measure achievements under the report. The success of the goals of this report are contingent upon strong forward movement by all sectors and improved systemic practices towards climate adaptation and mitigation. Yet the audience of the report is unclear and should be clarified to ensure everyone understands who to hold accountable for future efforts. In addition, it is critical that the report emphasize how sectors will be held accountable for achieving the goals through an ongoing, regular feedback process as well as how agencies will improve collaboration with each other, local governments, and community environmental justice efforts. Finally, rather than only connecting with community on updates of this report, the state should identify opportunities to regularly connect with communities, especially at the local and regional levels, to track and monitor progress, best practices, and provide updates to community partners, organizations, and other interested parties. State and local agencies and departments should also identify opportunities to conduct more effective community outreach including greater language diversity; more inclusive messengers such as youth; and more relevant, consumer friendly information, which includes making the *Safeguarding Report* more accessible to community.

Create an advisory committee that includes community representatives. An important way to create greater connection with community, and improve accountability and transparency, is to create an advisory committee that includes community leaders and representatives, who also hold decision-making authority around the report. The committee could also help to provide technical assistance on community engagement, greater linkages between the state and local efforts, and ways to include a more targeted focus on health, equity, and environmental justice.

Encourage greater collaboration among state and local agencies and departments on developing recommendations. This report should further collaboration between state and local agencies and departments to identify cross-cutting themes and solutions to climate change. Currently, each sector has its own section and develops its own recommendations without input from other agencies or departments. While there is a larger recommendation on collaboration between state and local governments, it is lacking concrete suggestions and goals, which could and should be informed by regional or local community discussions. Climate change will not affect just one sector. For example, climate change poses multiple threats to certain communities such as those with mixed residential and industrial zones, or where there are toxic chemicals and potential sea level rise, or areas with increasing heat waves and prisons without air conditioning. In addition to working across sectors to tackle these impending challenges, state and local agencies should be encouraged to work together to inform goals and recommendations, especially given local governments' planning authority. State and local governments should also share data and other useful information helpful in developing more informed recommendations. In addition, the policy recommendations should provide more concrete action steps towards achieving the larger goals outlined in the report.

Identify health, equity, anti-displacement, and environmental justice solutions through each chapter. Each sector provides an important vision for moving forward; however, there is a lack of focus on the most vulnerable communities and the health impacts of climate change. Therefore, a recommendation going forward is to thread priorities such as health, equity, anti-displacement, and environmental justice through each of the sectors to ensure that there is a prioritization of those communities most impacted, with the least resources, to address climate change.

Expand tools to identify vulnerable communities. The Safeguarding Plan requires a system to identify vulnerable populations and communities that are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts. Suggested tools to use include: CalEnviroScreen, the Environmental Justice Screening Method and the Health Disadvantage Index¹ to identify climate change threats. The State must use accurate data that is updated at least every 2 years as they develop climate adaptation policies.

Identify actions that meet goals of climate mitigation and climate adaptation, especially in vulnerable communities. Projects funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund can have adaptation co-benefits for vulnerable communities. The state must seek funding opportunities from private and public sources to make meaningful climate adaptation investments. Sectors

¹ The HDI identifies communities that may be missed by CES because they do not experience as much toxics exposure, but have numerous social, economic and place-based inequities, making them a climate vulnerable community. <http://phasocal.org/ca-hdi/>.

should implement actions that can simultaneously reduce GHG emissions and also make vulnerable communities more resilient.

Safeguarding California must prepare for unintended adverse consequences and include adaptive management strategies. Every sector plan must incorporate strategies that prepare for unintended negative consequences, such as displacement, that may occur when vulnerable communities are forced to relocate during extreme weather events. A model to follow is the Scoping Plan that ARB is required to prepare under AB 32 to explain California's approach to climate mitigation. The Plan requires ARB to evaluate the environmental and public health impacts of the Scoping Plan. *Safeguarding California* needs to include a similar mechanism that assesses impacts resulting from climate adaptation policies. Mechanisms such as adaptive management strategies can help address unintended negative impacts and allow for flexible changes in the future.

Acknowledge impacts of land use on resilience. The report should acknowledge the impacts of land use policies and planning on a city and community's ability to be healthy and resilient including accessing affordable, quality housing, which is not mentioned in this sector.

Acknowledge role of transportation on health. Transportation plays a significant role in connecting people to well-paying jobs, affordable housing, and improving economic opportunities in vulnerable communities in addition to its tremendous impacts on air quality. The report should identify goals that include having a strong public transportation system that addresses community needs, provides more options to improve resilience such as investing in bus systems, and identifies community points of vulnerability (not just transportation sector's).

Address transportation equity issues. Several issues are not adequately addressed in the report such as accessibility for low-income, disabled, elderly and other communities, and differences in access between rural, urban or suburban areas. These issues should be further accessed and addressed in the report and how a community's climate resilience will be impacted.

Coordinate public health and energy efforts. The recommendations and resulting activities are very siloed but there are cross-sector connections. Local energy and utility departments should be encouraged to coordinate with public health departments to address short and long term issues pertaining to climate change and health. For example, how can we help communities prepare for energy outages and surges? How do we advocate for clean energy technologies to protect the most vulnerable (people in emergency shelters, community centers, etc.) in the case of an outage or power surge? How are we prepared for disasters to ensure that diverse communities can be reached in language appropriate ways when power lines go down? What other places should be prioritized in the case of power outages such as homeless/emergency shelters, churches? Where are their accessible places for these communities in case of an emergency?

Ensure investment without displacement. Our policies must ensure that clean energy investments are not creating displacement by increasing housing and other cost of living. Housing and cost of living experiences should be more central to the report because it affects numerous aspects of energy policies.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this report. While it is an important effort, there are many improvements that could be made to the report going forward that would make huge strides towards improving community resilience in the face of climate change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Heller', written in a cursive style.

Jonathan Heller
Co-Director