



September 24, 2018

Mary D. Nichols, Chair, and Members
California Air Resources Board
1001 "I" Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Comments on AB 617 Community Air Protection Program – Community Selection and Program Requirements

Dear Chair Nichols and Board Members,

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the community selection and program requirements for Year 1 of AB 617 implementation.

AB 617 presents a unique opportunity for California's environmentally-burdened, disadvantaged communities: increased air quality monitoring and emissions reductions. While California's air quality has improved over the decades, many communities remain disproportionately impacted by air pollution. According to the American Lung Association, 8 out of 10 cities with the worst air quality in the country are in California. Sadly, this pollution is heavily concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color. These same communities are also exceptionally vulnerable to air pollution due to longstanding inequalities and limited access to health and other resources.

CCA has participated in many of the AB 617 workshops hosted by CARB and the air districts. We have also participated in many of the legislative hearings surrounding AB 617, and had many discussions with legislative, agency and community stakeholders. We appreciate having the opportunity to help shape the implementation of AB 617. While some of our comments, as well as the comments of allied organizations, have been taken into consideration, we wish to provide additional comments ahead of the September board meeting.

1) Actual emissions reductions must be prioritized; "paper compliance" and accounting should be avoided

We continue to stress the need for developing and using metrics measuring direct air pollutant emissions, and the reductions of those emissions. CCA opposes reliance upon emission factors to estimate emissions. Wherever possible, CARB should rely upon continuous emission monitoring using certified data collection methods that capture emissions from standard operations, startups, shutdowns, and malfunctions.

2) The community selection process should be driven by the community

CCA does not have a position on the merits of individual communities under consideration for Year 1 of AB 617 implementation. All communities being considered have long suffered from poor air quality and are exceptionally vulnerable to pollution's health impacts.

However, we believe the community selection process can be greatly improved by using a bottom-up approach that truly empowers the communities. While local air district staff are to be commended for the many workshops hosted throughout the state, the community selection process was very much a top-down exercise. Though CARB and the air districts created a "self-nomination" process for members of the public and local advocates, there was no community ownership of the effort. Ensuring that communities are vested and engaged with AB 617's implementation is vital to the legislation's success.

For these reasons, CCA urges CARB to adapt the model used by the San Joaquin Valley's AB 617 Environmental Justice Steering Committee in future years for community identification and prioritization. Their process, led by a coalition of 13 community organizations, was guided by science, local, first-hand experience and the need to achieve a consensus. Residents and local community advocates are experts about their neighborhoods. CARB and the air districts should fully utilize this local expertise.

3) Communities selected for air monitoring should be prioritized for an emissions reduction program.

Three of the ten communities selected for Year 1 implementation are currently being considered for additional air monitoring. These communities include Richmond, South Sacramento and the areas adjacent to Naval Base San Diego. While we recognize CARB has limited resources for AB 617, the communities selected for air monitoring only understandably desire more concrete action, especially since the sources of pollution for these areas are easily identifiable.

Air monitoring is a means to an end – cleaner air and exposure reduction – rather than an end unto itself. While air monitoring is an important step in the process, it cannot be the only step. As such, CARB should consider prioritizing communities selected for increased air monitoring in Year 1 for an emissions reduction program in the immediate future.

4) The final Community Air Protection Blueprint needs more specific benchmarks and targets, as well as accountability metrics

The final Community Air Protection Blueprint being considered by CARB gives the air district broad discretion in meeting its requirements. We recognize that CARB wants to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach in developing local emissions reduction plans.

However, the Blueprint should include specific goals for the air districts to meet, such as specific emissions reductions, improved health outcomes and community participation benchmarks. The Blueprint should also include mechanisms to address deficiencies in emissions reductions plans. Districts that do not set aggressive emissions reductions targets or fail to adequately engage with the community should be required to redesign deficient portions. Additionally, districts that fail to make satisfactory progress in the implementation of their emissions reduction plans must be held accountable.

CCA looks forward to continuing its participation in the implementation of AB 617. This legislation, if implemented fully and effectively, will provide significant relief to the most environmentally burdened and vulnerable Californians. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Chavez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Chris Chavez
Deputy Policy Director