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Tom Steyer

Chief Advisor to the Governor on Business and Jobs Recovery

Founder, NextGen America

By Email: adriana.sanchez-ochoa@nextgenpolicy.org

Re: Recommendations to Governor's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery for a Just Recovery & Clean Energy Future

Long before the COVID-19 crisis, many communities in California had already been living in a state of crisis. A history of racial and economic inequality has locked in political structures that have prevented workers and families across the state—predominantly in low-income and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities—from accessing basic human needs. Due to the impacts of systemic racism and an extractivist economy, many continue to struggle to secure safe and healthy homes, meaningful jobs, good-quality education, healthcare, nutritious food, and a clean environment. In the past several weeks, we have been brutally reminded of the role that police and state violence play in further reducing the life expectancies and quality of life of Black community members.

These threats are not new to our communities. However, the global pandemic has exposed and exacerbated their impacts on our state's most disenfranchised residents. Although the state has made efforts to provide some economic relief, much more must be done to heal and transform. A Just Recovery from COVID-19 must be a recovery from the systemic racism and classism that has denied our communities the right to lead just and dignified lives. Instead of planning to return to "normal" conditions that were already harming our communities, California's decision-makers must rise to the task and implement a new set of conditions that empower our most vulnerable to thrive.

The Legislature must divest from harmful industries and institutions, and reinvest in the health, safety, and comfort of vulnerable communities. In California's energy sector, this requires transitioning off of dirty and dangerous fossil fuels and committing to clean, democratic, and resilient energy that improves public health and creates good-paying jobs and careers. It also means expanding economic relief for our most vulnerable populations. At Regenerate California, a coalition led by the California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) and the Sierra Club, we strongly urge decision-makers to provide full economic relief for environmental justice communities. In addition, funding mechanisms for relief and clean energy investments should not harm these populations and instead begin to repair and transform historic racial and economic inequities.

Furthermore, Regenerate CA offers the following recommendations and vision to CA decision-makers for a Just Recovery that moves us forward, not just from this crisis, but to a better and more equitable future. These recommendations should be accomplished through a process that includes strong community input and engagement to strengthen their implementation.

Invest in Clean Energy Resources and Infrastructure, Prioritizing Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities.

The recent public health crisis has highlighted environmental inequities that have literally resulted in life or death situations for people. Those most at risk of serious illness or death from the coronavirus have been low-income and BIPOC communities who have statistically experienced higher rates of respiratory illness and lung cancer because of living in areas with higher concentrations of air pollution due to dirty energy emissions.

The California Public Utilities Commission is on track to deploy thousands of gigawatts of clean energy resources by 2030 in order to achieve the state's climate and air quality mandates. More than half of that total procurement is anticipated to be constructed in the latter part of the decade. We have an opportunity to build many of these resources sooner rather than later, reducing health risks to our communities and creating much needed clean energy jobs that will advance California's leadership in tackling the climate crisis.

Expand Investments in Foundational Programs and Clean Energy:

- **Deploy Clean Energy in EJ Communities to meet our SB 100 Goals:** Deploying and prioritizing clean energy in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities will not only spur environmental and economic benefits in places with dirty air and high unemployment, but also ensure that we meet our climate targets as mandated by law. At the rate we are currently deploying clean and renewable resources on the grid, we are not on track to meet our climate targets because we are not transitioning off of gas at a sufficient rate. California is seen as a national and global leader in the fight against climate change, and targeted investment in communities that need it the most will put us back on track while creating good paying jobs and decreasing localized pollution that threatens EJ communities.
- **Expand Funding for The Low-Income Weatherization Program (LIWP):** The COVID crisis reveals that it is more vital than ever to ensure our residents' homes are healthy, clean, and structurally resilient. Housing retrofits, such as those delivered through the Low-Income Weatherization Program, improve ventilation, energy efficiency, weatherization, and hardening to support affordable and high-quality public housing units. Streamlining delivery of energy upgrades and home health remediation efforts is also being undertaken with the implementation of APEN-sponsored bill AB 1232: Healthy Homes Act (Gloria, 2019), which will ensure that disadvantaged communities can access and maximize these integrated benefits quickly. Other strategies to promote

home-based resilience that could be integrated alongside this program include offering financial support for air conditioning access and use to combat the health impacts of extreme heat as well as innovative insurance policies to finance pre- and post-disaster home repairs.

Implement New and Visionary Programs:

- **Economic Recovery EJ Multi-Family Resiliency Program:** This program would fund the implementation of clean energy, energy efficiency, and energy resilience services for California's disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations. These services would include solar and storage, home weatherization upgrades, microgrids and distributed energy infrastructure, and clean transportation options in buildings. The EJ Multi-Family Resiliency Program would expand the scope and funding of existing energy programs—including LIWP, SOMAH and SGIP—and ensure there is strong coordination between them to maximize benefits for low-income residents. The program will have strong workforce development standards and tenant protections to ensure that all the investments avoid causing unintended harm. Streamlining and expanding California's various energy services for EJ communities will provide numerous benefits including reduced energy costs; reduced greenhouse gas emissions; improved air quality; healthier and safer homes; and local, high-quality job creation in the clean energy economy.
- **Community Resilience Centers:** Emergency funding should be available to create community resilience centers, or neighborhood-based essential service providers offering crisis response. This can be done by installing solar and storage systems at schools, parks, senior and youth centers, and libraries, among others. Community resilience centers should provide clean backup power, drinking water, air filters, cooling, and other forms of assistance. These resilience centers should be established through community-based emergency evacuation plans and routes with a focus on the elderly, disabled, linguistically isolated, and rural communities.

Plan Now for an Orderly Retirement of Gas, Prioritizing Retirement in EJ Communities.

Gas is one of the leading causes of climate change and poses huge health and safety risks to environmental justice communities. These risks include increasing air pollution leading to serious health risks; releasing greenhouse gases contributing to the climate crisis; causing various pipeline explosions, gas leaks, and wildfires; and contaminating our water with toxic chemicals. In addition, due to the rapid development of clean energy technology, gas is already becoming more expensive than renewable and clean energy and storage. During this fiscally challenging budget cycle, it is now more important than ever to safeguard affordability by reducing wasteful spending of ratepayer money on stranded assets that would not be used past 2045.

Plan to Justly Phase out Gas in California:

- **Demand that state agencies develop an orderly transition off of gas** that includes meaningful interim benchmarks toward a phase-out of all fossil fuels, prioritizing environmental justice communities. Despite California's renewable energy targets, we still continue to invest in and extend the lives of dangerous and expensive fossil fuel infrastructure. Recently, the California Public Utilities Commission unanimously voted to extend the once-through-cooling deadlines of five gas plants. Without an orderly transition, California risks continuing business-as-usual. By planning for the retirement of fossil fuels, we can mitigate the health, economic, and reliability impacts of unplanned retirements and achieve our climate goals.
- **Enact protections and assistance to transition gas workforce**. In order to protect vulnerable communities, we urge policymakers to provide meaningful assistance and opportunities to workers displaced by retiring gas plants in California. This should include community benefit agreements and project labor agreements. Training and education programs should also be offered to equip workers with the skills needed to access family-sustaining jobs and careers in the clean energy economy. Finally, a Worker Transition Fund should be used to distribute funds to displaced workers in order to mitigate immediate economic impacts and assist with the transition to other job sectors such as the clean energy sector.
- **Create a plan to clean up retired gas sites**. Recent events have also highlighted the need to ensure owners of gas plants are required to pay for the clean up of their facilities, and should be prohibited from forcing their clean up obligations on vulnerable communities. This is especially important for places such as the Halaco Superfund site on the coast of Oxnard, which is at risk of flooding and contamination due to sea level rise. For all of this funding, we recommend mandating gas plant owners to pay for cleaning up retired sites.

Provide Economic Relief through Utility Assistance.

Keeping the power on is essential for our communities to care for themselves and their families, especially in this period of social distancing. Homes need sustained, reliable, and affordable power for storing and accessing food and medical equipment, providing heating and cooling, accessing information and virtual school or work responsibilities, and other critical needs.

- **Ensure inclusive and sustained moratorium on disconnections**. We urge the State to ensure shutoff prohibitions extend and apply to all public and private utilities and service providers beyond CPUC-regulated providers including electric, gas, and water municipal corporations, municipal utility districts, and public utility districts. We also urge the State to confirm that electric and gas utilities have reconnected any customers who were previously disconnected due to nonpayment. This suspension of shutoffs and restoration of services should remain in place for at least a one-year recovery period beyond the end date of the state of emergency to allow families to recover financially from unemployment and other economic impacts.

- **Expand debt relief for utility customers.** We thank the CPUC for their recently approved decision to implement a utility arrearages forgiveness plan designed to waive 1/12th of a ratepayer's arrearages for each month they pay their bills. However, for our most vulnerable communities, even more expansive protections are necessary. Therefore, we call on the CPUC to enact full debt relief for those most impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Without a cancellation of debt accrued during the crisis, communities will experience a wave of disconnections when billing resumes due to households' inability to develop savings during this time. All utilities and service providers should forgive customer debt to support economic stability among impacted communities.
- **Exclude cost recovery from ratepayers for customer protections.** The State should ensure that costs incurred by utilities in implementing customer protections in response to COVID-19 are not passed on to ratepayers, resulting in further increased rates.

During this pivotal moment in history, we know that the actions we take now will impact how our economy operates for decades to come. Cuts to programs that vulnerable communities depend on will only exacerbate the issues the state has been working to solve since the last economic downturn. As such, we can either allow slow and incremental actions to bring our state to a "normal" that continues to harm our most vulnerable residents—or we can chart a new course. We urge decision-makers across California to rise to the challenge, pursue the latter option and build a new economy rooted in justice and equity. In implementing a Just Recovery, we can create an economy that finally puts our communities first.

Sincerely,

Jose Torres
California Environmental Justice Alliance

Luis Amezcua
Sierra Club