



August 24, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California

The Honorable Toni Atkins
Senate President Pro Tempore

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, California 95814

David Hochschild
Chair, California Energy Commission
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Marybel Batjer
President, California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Ave
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Responding to Rolling Blackouts

Dear Governor Newsom, Pro Tempore Atkins, Speaker Rendon, Chair Hochschild, and President Batjer:

This past week, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and historic extreme heatwaves, rotating blackouts cut electricity to millions of Californians. Going without power especially harmed many low-income communities of color who are already

vulnerable to extreme heat and were left unable to use air conditioning, refrigerate food, or access needed medical equipment.

Climate and environmental justice advocates have long warned that our reliance on fossil fuels would intensify extreme weather and cause harm to our communities. The heatwaves, wildfires, and power outages are a testament to this. Despite the state's commitment to supply 100% clean electricity by 2045, more than a third of California's electricity generation still comes from natural gas. California's path to a reliable and sustainable electricity grid requires that we rapidly transition to renewable energy, increase storage capacity, promote energy efficiency, demand response, and make needed changes to the resource adequacy program.

We reject the opportunistic and cynical industry-led assertion that some gas interests promote that California's push to renewable energy is to blame for the recent rotating blackouts. It is simply not true. While the specific factors that caused the blackouts are still being investigated, we already know that our fossil-fuel based system is contributing to climate change, extreme heat, and consequent surges in energy demand. We need to do our part by reducing carbon emissions from the electric grid while making our grid more resilient to climate change. To do so, we need to invest in a diverse portfolio of renewable energy, storage resources, and demand side management. Much more energy storage needs to be coupled with clean resources that increase the electricity supply or reduce electricity demand during the evening hours when reliability challenges are most likely to occur. Investments in clean grid resources that reduce load are urgently needed, including much larger investments in energy efficiency, demand response, and distributed energy resources. As we saw recently, many California consumers cut their electricity consumption to help avoid even more rotating outages. An effective and well planned demand response program can achieve much more while making sure all Californians' energy needs are met. Again, California will need to take all of these approaches to modernize our grid and ensure safety and reliability during the transition to 100 percent clean electricity.

We appreciate the administration's immediate response to the outages. But we are also concerned by the administration's recent actions to suspension of air pollution control regulations. The pause temporarily removed air quality protections from fossil-fueled power plants and allowed dirty diesel generators to operate without restrictions, spewing air pollution into communities already breathing toxic unhealthy air due to living near oil and gas sites, and now also due to the state's ongoing wildfires. While we understand these actions were taken as emergency measures, we hope that moving forward, no communities will have to sacrifice their health as a result of poor planning. This highlights the need to strengthen our economy and our health by moving away from outdated energy policy and working for faster procurement of clean energy in environmental justice communities.

To meet our 2045 goals efficiently, PUC modeling has shown that we need nearly 20 gigawatts of battery storage and 30 gigawatts of renewable resources by 2030. Through smart planning, we can bring these resources to scale, in locations which can most benefit communities who have historically suffered from air pollution and

other fossil fuel impacts while protecting California's natural resources. Meeting this will also ensure we can produce good, clean-energy jobs.

California must not allow the blackouts to delay or weaken the state's clean energy commitment. Rather, they should be an impetus to accelerate the transition and invest now in cleaner resources to keep our lights on and our communities safe.

Sincerely,

Kathy Dervin, Co-chair of Legislative Committee, **350 Bay Area Action**

Jose G. Torres, Energy Equity Program Manager, **California Environmental Justice Alliance**

Melissa Romero, Legislative Affairs Manager, **California League of Conservation Voters**

Linda Rudolph, MD, MPH, **Center for Climate Change and Health**

Dr. Catherine Garoupa White, Executive Director, **Central Valley Air Quality Coalition**

Ellie Cohen, Chief Executive Officer, **The Climate Center**

Bill Magavern, Policy Director, **Coalition for Clean Air**

Pamela Flick, California Program Director, **Defenders of Wildlife**

Sara Gersen, Clean Energy Staff Attorney, **Earth Justice**

Dan Jacobson, State Director, **Environment California**

Michael Colvin, Director Regulatory and Legislative Affairs, California Energy Program, **Environmental Defense Fund**

Bill Allayaud, California Director of Government Affairs, **Environmental Working Group**

Mohit Chhabra, Senior Scientist, Climate and Energy Program, **Natural Resources Defense Council**

Jay Ziegler, Director of External Affairs and Policy, **The Nature Conservancy**

Arnold Sowell, Jr., Executive Director, **NextGen California**

Joel Ervice, Associate Director, **Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP)**

Kathryn Phillips, Director, **Sierra Club California**

Mark Specht, Senior Energy Analyst, **Union of Concerned Scientists**