

April 2, 2021

Dear Members of the California State Senate Natural Resources and Water and Environmental Quality Committees,

We, the undersigned organizations, representing nearly 19,000 physicians, nurses and health professionals in California. We thank those of you who have expressed **support for Senate Bill 467**.

Climate change - driven by the burning of fossil fuels - is a health emergency for each and every one of us; more importantly, it poses a threat to the health of our children and future generations. The combustion of fossil fuels is also deadly right now. New research shows that 20% -- 1 in 5 -- premature deaths in 2018 worldwide were attributable to pollution from fossil fuels.¹ **This is twice the mortality rate caused by fossil fuels that was previously understood.** In the U.S., pollution from fossil fuels resulted in the premature death of over 355,000 people in 2018. **California ranks highest in states with premature deaths attributable to fossil fuel pollution.**

Just as we physicians, nurses, and many other health professionals are on the frontlines of the COVID pandemic, we are also on the frontlines of the climate health crisis. We see firsthand the ways in which oil and gas drilling harms the health of our patients. **To protect the health of Californians, we are calling on you to support SB 467 to take the first steps necessary to ensure a livable California for our children and a just transition for our current oil and gas workers.**

The scientific evidence about the health harms associated with living near oil and gas drilling is plentiful and deeply concerning; moreover, it points clearly to the urgent need for setbacks between oil and gas drilling and places where children go to school and where families live. Oil and gas extraction releases air pollutants including fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), diesel PM, nitrogen oxides (NO_x), secondary ozone formation and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which have robust linkages with respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological problems in children and adults, as well as with low birth weight and preterm birth.^{2,3,4} Studies from across the U.S. have found that people living in close proximity to oil and gas drilling have higher rates of asthma, childhood and adult cancer, and birth defects.^{5,6,7,8}

Increasingly, studies of people in California are clearly documenting the health harms of living in close proximity to oil and gas drilling. In June 2020, researchers at UC Berkeley, Columbia University and San Francisco State published their analysis of nearly 3 million births to Californian mothers living within 10 km (6.2 miles) of one production well and found that for mothers in rural areas, proximity to higher production oil and gas development was associated with adverse birth outcomes, including low birth weight.⁹ A separate study by researchers at Stanford looked at over 200,000 births to mothers in the San Joaquin Valley and found exposure to oil and gas wells to be associated with increased risk of spontaneous preterm birth,¹⁰ the leading cause of U.S. infant mortality.¹¹ This study also found that exposure to new (pre-production) wells is associated with higher exposure to particulate matter, which has been linked to higher rates of death from COVID-19.

Similarly, there is mounting evidence about the health harms specifically linked to fracking and unconventional oil and gas drilling, including increased rates of cancer, cardiac, respiratory and neurologic disease, premature births and birth defects, and poor mental health among those living near these drill sites.^{12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22}

The distribution of the health harms of oil and gas drilling in California is unequal, with an extremely outsized burden falling on low-income communities and communities of color. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 21,000 new oil wells drilled in California between 2011 and 2018 were located in low-income minority communities.²³ People of color comprise 92% of the 1.8 million Californians living within a mile of oil and gas development.²⁴ There is mounting evidence that in the United States, **people exposed to chronic air pollution are at increased risk of dying when sick with COVID-19 than those who breathe cleaner air.**^{25,26} Black and Latinx communities in California, who are suffering disproportionately from COVID-19 deaths relative to white Californians,²⁷ are also more likely to live within 2500 feet of oil and gas drilling sites.²⁸

In addition, children who are already overburdened by pollution in frontline communities are overburdened by COVID-19. Disturbing evidence recently published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that Black and Hispanic children in the U.S., including California, are 5 to 8 times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 and with Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). One out of three of these children requires ICU admission.^{29,30} Though the cause of this disproportionate impact is multifactorial, ongoing exposure to pollutants has been shown to be a contributing factor. **This emerging information adds to the urgency of mandating setbacks to protect marginalized communities in California.** Over time, exposure to toxic substances and the nature of harm linked to these exposures expands as new information emerges; as such, we should employ the precautionary principle in the face of an ongoing and novel health threat.

California lags significantly behind other states in protecting residents from the health harms caused by oil and gas drilling. Of the top eight oil-producing states in the U.S., four have at least some statewide buffer zone requirements to protect health — Colorado, North Dakota, Texas and Wyoming.³¹ Some counties, like San Miguel in New Mexico, require 4,000-foot setbacks.³² In California's own Ventura County there are 1,500 foot setbacks from homes and 2,500-foot setbacks from schools that were established in 2020.³³

Oil and gas drilling is dangerous to health and threatens the future of California for our children. Creating a minimum 2,500-foot setback and ending extreme oil extraction in California is a vital step to improving health and lowering unacceptable racial inequities in our state. We need all forms of our government, especially our legislature, fighting to protect the health of Californians at this pivotal time.

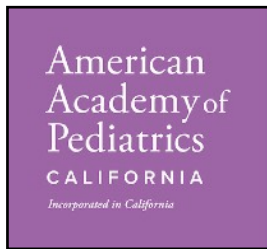
We are your physicians, nurses, and health providers. As trusted leaders in our communities across the state, we are calling on you to support this bill and protect health. Now is the time for our legislators to prioritize the health and safety of Californians over the profit interests of the fossil fuel industry. We understand that joblessness is a social determinant of health, which is why we strongly support a just transition for oil and gas workers.

It is not every day that your actions have the potential to save lives. Our patients and our children -- your constituents and families -- need you.

Vote YES on SB 467.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics California
American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology District IX
Center for Climate Change and Health
Central California Asthma Collaboration
Climate Action Campaign - Public Health Advisory Council
Climate Health Now
Climate 911
Climate Psychiatry Alliance
Physicians for a National Health Program - California
Physicians for Social Responsibility - SF Bay Chapter
Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles Chapter
San Diego Pediatricians for Clean Air
San Francisco Marin Medical Society





The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS



**Alliance of Nurses for
Healthy Environments**

Bringing Science and Passion to the Environmental Health Movement



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