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Assurances about state of art technology disingenuous

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (Docket No. 23-AFC-04), currently under consideration by the California Energy Commission.

This 13-acre site in northern San Juan Capistrano has long been a symbol of peace and community service. Formerly home to the Rancho Capistrano campus of Saddleback Church, the property has functioned for decades as a spiritual, cultural, and family-oriented gathering place. Thousands of local residents made the decision to buy homes and raise families in this area with the expectation “based on public land use, city planning, and decades of precedent” that this property would continue to serve a low-intensity, community-focused purpose.

The site is zoned as Planned Community (PC), which does not allow for industrial-scale energy projects. In 2022, the San Juan Capistrano City Council explicitly denied a request to change the zoning or to authorize the development of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at this location. The community supported this decision, which was grounded in sound land-use planning, safety concerns, and a respect for the area’s character.

Despite this, the applicant now seeks to override our city’s lawful decision through the state’s Opt-In Certification process under AB 205. This effort to bypass local authority threatens the integrity of municipal governance and betrays the trust of the very community this project will endanger.

The fire and public safety risks posed by BESS facilities are well-documented. Incidents in other states and countries “including fires, explosions, and toxic gas releases” have required massive emergency responses, endangered lives, and led to extensive evacuations. San Juan Capistrano is already designated as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and this proposed facility would be located within close proximity to homes, senior residential facilities, a preschool, public and private schools, and essential traffic corridors needed for evacuation in an emergency. This project would place thousands of residents, including vulnerable children and seniors, at direct and unacceptable risk.

While the applicant claims that this facility will include state-of-the-art fire suppression, monitoring, and containment systems, it must be acknowledged that these improvements are new, largely untested in real-world crisis situations, and too recent to be proven fail-safe. In fact, many of the technologies being promoted are in response to earlier BESS failures “meaning their real-world performance under stress, thermal runaway, or seismic activity is unknown. The residents of San Juan Capistrano and

Laguna Niguel should not be forced to become a test case for emerging fire-control technologies when the consequences of failure are so severe.

The City of San Juan Capistrano acted responsibly by rejecting this project. In May 2024, the City passed Urgency Ordinance No. 1119, enacting a moratorium on commercial battery storage systems due to legitimate public safety and planning concerns. The State should not override that carefully considered action.

This project is wrong for this location, and its potential risks far outweigh its claimed benefits — particularly in a dense, fire-prone area adjacent to schools and homes. I urge the California Energy Commission to respect the City's zoning decision, acknowledge the lack of long-term safety data for the proposed systems, and deny certification for the Compass Energy Storage Project.