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June 9, 2025

Governor Gavin Newsom
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Commissioner J. Andrew McCallister, Ph.D.
California Energy Commission
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Commissioner Nancy Skinner
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Re: Improving AB 205 Implementation: Clearer Standards for Community Benefits

Dear Governor Newsom, Secretary Crowfoot, and Commissioners:

[Rural Communities Rising](#) (RCR) is a new 501(c)(3) dedicated to elevating rural, historically underserved, and primarily farm worker communities in Western Fresno County. RCR's mission is to help these communities collaboratively navigate the opportunities and significant changes brought about by climate change influenced agricultural land retirements and subsequent large-scale clean energy development. In response to the more than 200,000 acres of Western Fresno County agricultural land that will be converted into utility-scale solar, battery storage, and other clean energy developments, RCR was created and built by residents and leaders from 36 impacted rural communities—many of which have been neglected for decades—to increase their knowledge and capacity to capture tangible and meaningful benefits for these impacted residents through dialogue and partnerships with developers and lead agencies.

RCR's goals are: 1) united communities, with organized resident voices that are heard, respected, and prioritized in this rapidly evolving landscape, 2) communities that are fully capable of securing self-determined, long-term health, well-being, and economic benefits. RCR's has now achieved broad regional representation with 16 rural community resident board members in place and will have a 21-person board (elected by their rural peers) to represent the 36 identified communities in Western Fresno County; this Board election will be completed in June 2025 and 3) accelerate deployment of clean energy projects that meet Project Acceptance Community Terms (PACT).



Starting this month, under the guidance of its new community-led Board, RCR will engage and establish partnerships with developers, local government, state agencies, and other stakeholders to shape clean energy development in Western Fresno County. As an authentic, self-determined community voice with standing, RCR supports the timely and efficient development of clean energy projects throughout Western Fresno County, and will advocate for appropriate, and meaningful, community-determined benefit agreements.

In support of historically overlooked and underfunded communities, and with the intent of streamlining the permitting process for impending utility-scale renewable development, RCR has created PACT (Project Acceptance Community Terms), a community-developed framework to accelerate clean energy projects. RCR is vetting this framework with community leaders, developers, local and state governments, and national experts on community benefits agreements related to large-scale renewable energy development.

Since RCR has been in its organizational and board development formation stage during the Darden Clean Energy Project CEC permitting process, RCR is not seeking community benefits from this project. However, consistent with RCR's principles, RCR supports Cantua Creek, Five Points, and El Provenir - the three rural communities nearest to Darden Clean Energy Project - receiving direct benefits from the Darden project in the form of a CBA and/or county property and sales taxes specifically dedicated to these communities.

In the future, RCR recommends that the CEC and/or the Legislature provide greater clarity regarding CBA requirements for future projects, whether permitted through local jurisdictions or under the CEC's AB 205 opt-in process. For example, PRC Section 25545.10 lacks specificity regarding what constitutes a qualifying CBA. While the statute outlines potential agreement topics, such as workforce development, job quality and access, and community improvements, it does not define minimum standards, enforcement mechanisms, or the degree of stakeholder engagement required. Most critically, the current code does not specify when a developer has met their obligation under this provision, leaving both project applicants and communities uncertain about compliance. This ambiguity risks inconsistent implementation and may weaken the effectiveness of CBAs in delivering meaningful and durable community benefits and create project delays. Clarifying these provisions would promote transparency, ensure fair outcomes, and provide greater certainty for all parties involved.

RCR looks forward to building meaningful, long-term relationships with renewable developers who are interested in working directly with our impacted communities in Western Fresno, and beyond.



Best regards,

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