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Opposition to Proposed Compass Energy Storage Project (24-OPT-02)

Dear California Energy Commissioners,

As a concerned resident of the City of Laguna Niguel and the pastor of a church in San Juan Capistrano, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed battery energy storage system (BESS) facility. The project applicant, Compass Energy Storage LLC, is proposing to construct, own, and operate an approximately 250-megawatt BESS facility on a 13-acre project site along the northern portion of the City of San Juan Capistrano immediately adjacent to the eastern border of Laguna Niguel. The project site, which is less than 1,500 feet from several residential neighborhoods in Laguna Niguel and even closer to our church, is confined within a designated general open space hillside surrounded by native plants and significant vegetation, brush, and two recreational nature trails. This close proximity to residential areas heightens the potential risk to the community and to the parish.

The proposed location of Compass Energy Storage's project site poses significant and immediate wildfire risks. The BESS facility would be composed of lithium-iron phosphate batteries, which can be incredibly dangerous if they overheat, causing the battery to catch fire. Lithium battery fires burn hotter and faster than other fires and cannot be easily extinguished. Lithium batteries can reignite twenty-one (21) days after extinguishing the fire, presenting a long-lasting and persistent threat. Should the lithium batteries overheat and catch fire, the proposed project site's natural vegetation, steep terrain and surrounding landscape pose a significant and immediate fire threat.

In the past ten years, there have been twenty-three (23) wildfires within a five-mile radius of the proposed project site. Given the nature of lithium battery fires, firefighters are forced to take a containment approach. Should a fire break containment, all nearby homes and businesses would be in immediate fire danger. The imminent fire risk posed by the BESS facility threatens residents' safety and further exacerbates the state's homeowner's insurance crisis, making it even more difficult for residents to obtain adequate homeowner's insurance policies, compounding the already dire situation.

In addition to the heightened risk of wildfires, the proposed BESS project site presents significant environmental and public health risks. Lithium batteries emit toxic gases within seconds of igniting, leading to air pollution and public health risks. Any fire, regardless of size generates a significant risk for our first responders' health should this project be approved.

Should first responders quickly extinguish a lithium battery fire, they would be exposed

to hazardous toxic gases, which can cause severe debilitating health impacts. If the fire is not readily extinguished, the toxic gases emitted would generate a significant public health risk for the surrounding communities. Any water or fire extinguishing compounds used to combat the fire will become easily contaminated with heavy metals and absorbed into the region's soil, adversely impacting the local ecosystem and population. The project's close proximity to the Oso and Arroyo Creek waterbed further exacerbates potential water quality issues, contaminating the San Juan Creek Watershed, which flows to the Pacific Ocean just miles away.

I strongly urge the California Energy Commission to carefully and fully consider these adverse fire, economic, environmental, and public safety risks as they evaluate Compass Energy Storage's proposed project. The health and safety of California residents should always take precedence over any potential benefits proposed by this project. I respectfully request that the California Energy Commission reject this project application and unequivocally prioritize public safety and community quality of life.

Sincerely,
Fr. Daniel Habib