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NRDC Comments on Multifamily Restructuring and Economizer Requirements

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

Dear Commissioner McAllister and Energy Commission Staff:

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and its more than 450,000 members and activists in California advocating for affordable and equitable decarbonization and clean air policies in buildings to help mitigate the climate crisis, we respectfully submit the following comments in response to the California Energy Commission's (CEC's) December 2, 2020 Workshop on the Economizer Provisions and Multifamily Restructuring measures proposed for the 2022 Title 24 Standards.

NRDC supports both measures as proposed and recommends that they be adopted for the 2022 code. We offer the following specific comments on each measure:

Multifamily Restructuring

NRDC continues to strongly support the creation of a separate multifamily section of the code. Having a single multifamily section will clarify and streamline requirements for multifamily projects, which now must comply with a patchwork of standards across the single family and nonresidential chapters of the code, depending on the building height. The single multifamily chapter will unify requirements for this sector and reduce market confusion, which will increase code compliance. Additionally, the standalone multifamily chapter will allow for future energy efficiency measures to be targeted specifically for this building type, enhancing the potential for future cost-effective savings.

Packages of Measures

As submitted in previous joint comments submitted October 27, 2020, NRDC strongly urges the CEC to adopt a packaged metric approach for the evaluation of cost-effectiveness, at least for new construction requirements both in the multifamily chapter analysis and more broadly. Cost-effectiveness of the code in its entirety, as a package, is clearly authorized by the Warren-Alquist Act, as outlined in the previously submitted comments. Furthermore, new construction prescriptive requirements will, by law, always occur as a package – it therefore makes sense to analyze them as such. The performance path allows a building to make tradeoffs against this

baseline cost-effective package to accommodate their specific project constraints. Failing to evaluate measures as a package hampers the CEC by not taking into account the interactions between measures and missing opportunities to “tunnel through the cost barrier”¹ and achieve the deep increases in energy efficiency necessary to meet the state’s climate goals.

Finally, in developing the multifamily chapter, we also urge the CEC to ensure that any relevant updates made in the 2022 standards for non-residential buildings be carried over into the multifamily code. The current proposal simply combines provisions of the 2019 code from the single family and nonresidential requirements. Where these requirements are updated in 2022, these updates should be carried over into the multifamily chapter so as not to effectively miss a code cycle for multifamily buildings.

Economizer Threshold

NRDC supports expanding the economizer requirement down to units with capacities greater than 33,000 Btu/h. This is a common sense, cost-effective measure that will utilize free outside air to provide cooling when outdoor conditions allow, while providing increased ventilation air. An additional CASE report was submitted by Verified and Big Ladder software, recommending that the economizer requirement be reduced even further to 18,000 Btu/h. We recommend that the CEC consider adopting this lower threshold in climate zones where it is cost-effective.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and strongly encourage the CEC to adopt the economizer and multifamily chapter measures as part of the 2022 Title 24 Standards.

Sincerely,

Pierre Delforge
Senior Scientist
Natural Resources Defense Council

¹ See: Lovins, Amory, *Natural Capitalism: Chapter 6 – Tunneling through the Cost Barrier*, <https://rmi.org/insight/natural-capitalism-chapter-6-tunneling-through-the-cost-barrier-original/>