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Concerning Community Engagement in Fenceline Communities

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

November 4th, 2021

Commissioner Silvia Paz, Chair
Commissioner Ryan Kelley, Co-Chair
California Energy Commission
Lithium Valley Commission
Sacramento, California

Re: Concerning Community Engagement in Fenceline Communities

On behalf of the “undersigned organizations”, (We) respectfully submit the following comments pertinent to the concerning status of community engagement by the California Energy Commission, Lithium Valley Commission and other planning entities.

We have a substantial history of serving the communities of the region and have always been engaged in environmental health and social justice concerns, and lithium recovery is not an exception to our work. We are deeply involved in these efforts. We support it and want to ensure it is done through transparency that honors community engagement throughout every step. Conversations about equity and the Lithium Valley are ongoing between the State agencies and representatives. They fail to provide the disadvantaged communities, which are most impacted by the extraction of lithium, opportunities to engage. True equity honors the lived experiences of those directly impacted. Their input needs to help drive actions involving the Lithium Valley. The fenceline communities such as Calipatria, Niland, Brawley, and Westmorland and all impacted communities are not being given the opportunity to use their voice in the decision-making process. Why aren't these fenceline communities being given the chance they rightfully deserve to voice their opinions and concerns if they are the ones most affected by lithium recovery because of their proximity to the known lithium extraction area where geothermal has already been in operation for half a century.

We have performed outreach throughout the Imperial Valley including the aforementioned communities that are fenceline to future lithium operations. We, as grassroots organizations, are committed to meeting with community members face to face to properly inform, engage, and encourage them to participate as advocates during this pivotal opportunity. On September 22nd, there was a meeting regarding the upcoming Lithium Valley Commission Community Forum happening on November 17 and its logistics, where there was discussion and agreement on the dates for that meeting. **A follow-up community**

engagement preparation meeting was held and when selecting an appropriate venue or venues, there was no consultation with the community-based organizations in Imperial County so that we could advise on community accessible and trusted locations.

It is well understood that the known geothermal resource area is situated in the southernmost part of the Salton Sea which is in the Imperial Valley. If this is the case, would it not be logical to consider a meeting in this region? During the October 28th Lithium Valley Commission meeting, a member of Comite Civico publicly referenced how meaningful community outreach would be conducted. Commissioner Silvia Paz acknowledged that there were geographical challenges and stated some areas may not have services or places to meet. Commissioner Silvia Paz we recognize your comments and expertise as a community advocate, which is why it should be important to the CEC to fully engage with all stakeholders possible in a meaningful way. We believe community sites would have been secured for this meeting if the CEC Zoom meetings about community engagement would have continued. The CEC and other planning entities are aware that we have hosted several events throughout Imperial County and are committed to help identify appropriate venues. It is not acceptable to use lack of access to an appropriate meeting location as a rationale to forgo a meeting with affected communities in Imperial County.

If equity is to be honored at every step, then an equitable plan for community outreach and engagement must be developed, implemented, and it must include the fenceline disadvantaged communities that will be affected. It is felt that this part of the process is falling short at this time. We ask that community engagement expectations for proximity, fenceline and the entire Salton Sea region be clearly established to build confidence that future community engagement meetings meet their objective.

We respectfully request your support on this matter.

Sincerely,

Eric Reyes, Executive Director
Los Amigos de la Comunidad

John Hernandez, Executive Director
Our Roots Multicultural Center

Christian Torres, Programs Manager
Comite Civico del Valle

Daniela Flores & Luis Flores,
Community Advocate and Organizers
Imperial Valley Equity and Justice Coalition

Isabel Solis, Coordinator
La Coalición de la Buena Salud y el Bienestar Comunitario

CC:

Lithium Valley Commissioners
Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia
Elisabeth De Jong, California Energy Commission