

Community Groups, Legislators from Polluted Neighborhoods Support Senate Bill

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SACRAMENTO -- Environmental justice organizations, representing over 20,000 people in low-income communities and communities of color, on Tuesday called for passage of Senate Bill 32. The legislation by Sen. Fran Pavley accelerates California's fight against climate pollution.

With just four days left in the legislative session, Pavley of Agoura Hills was joined by leaders from the California Environmental Justice Alliance. Her bill also received support from key lawmakers, including Assembly Members Sebastian Ridley-Thomas and Reginald Jones-Sawyer of Los Angeles and Cristina Garcia of Bell Gardens.

"Our communities are on the front lines of climate change and struggle with dirty air and respiratory issues," said Quentin Foster, the Alliance's policy director, at a Capitol press conference. "SB 32 is helping to maximize public health and environmental benefits within climate policy, and that is why we support this important bill and urge Assembly members to join us."

Pavley's bill extends and deepens the commitment set by Pavley's Assembly Bill 32. The 2006 legislation set tough-but-attainable targets for reducing climate pollution emissions through 2020. The pending bill sets a new long-range pollution standard for 2050 and an interim goal for 2030.

SB 32 is critical to protect communities located near ports, freeways, refineries, factories and power plants that are exposed to more health-impairing pollution than higher-income neighborhoods.

"I live in Bell Gardens. My neighbors live their lives surrounded by a noxious blend of emissions from six highways that choke my district..." said Garcia. "If disadvantaged communities like the ones I represent are going to see further improvements, we need to have long-term goals to keep us moving in the right direction."

Pavley stressed that she's "always been concerned about the people, families and communities who are most victimized" by historic forms of pollution, such as diesel soot, and threatened by carbon and other climate pollutants. "We want to make sure that not just the impacts of climate change come to their communities

but also the benefits” from renewable energy, weatherization and related mitigation efforts.

Amendments to Pavley’s bill ensure that environmental justice communities are protected with strict regulation from harmful air contaminants. They also will be eligible to get fair shares of assistance, including jobs and employment training to work in the clean technology industry.

The amendments also require state scientists to study the impact of climate pollution laws on environmental justice communities.

“With SB 32 and with Sen. Pavley’s leadership, I and other members from Los Angeles will be able to bring resources home,” said Ridley-Thomas.

Byron Gudiel, executive director of Communities for a Better Environment, said he supports the amendments because they require state agencies to set a high priority on cleaning up the worst sources of pollutions.

That means that “reductions in emissions directly benefit working-class Californians,” Jones-Sawyer said.

Another supporter, Miya Yoshitani, executive director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, praised SB 32 for bringing “real public health benefits to the neighborhoods that need it most,” such as those where low-income immigrants and refugees live.

SB 32 will bring hope to the heavily polluted San Joaquin Valley, added Caroline Farrell, executive director of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment.

“For climate policy to create meaningful change here in California,” she said, “it must address the economic and environmental health burdens in the most impacted communities.”

Climate change, added Martha Dina Arguello, executive director of Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles, “is the gravest public health threat of our time.”

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Lawmakers and representatives of heavily polluted neighborhoods participate in a Capitol press conference Tuesday to support Sen. Fran Pavley's Senate Bill 32. The measure sets a framework for reducing climate pollution between 2020 and 2050. From left to right are Quentin Foster, policy advocate for the California Environmental Justice Alliance; Assembly Member Sebastian Ridley-Thomas of Los Angeles, Senator Fran Pavley of Agoura Hills and Assembly Member Cristina Garcia of Bell Gardens.