



Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, 56th Assembly District

AB 197 – Climate Equity and Transparency Act

Updated: 6/21/16

BACKGROUND

California has long been a leader in developing solutions that are good for the economy and the environment as demonstrated by the bipartisan passage in 2006 of the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32). Since 2006 the state has reduced nearly 100 million tons of greenhouse gases (GHGs). AB 32 also requires the Air Resources Board (ARB) to monitor, regulate and reduce GHG emissions within the state and provides opportunity for public comment on proposed decisions. Other state agencies have developed and are implementing innovative programs that are helping the state to meet its goal of reducing GHGs.

However, a growing body of research shows that there are some significant improvements that can be implemented to ensure benefits accrue to the state's most environmentally blighted communities, which are primarily communities of color, living on the front lines of climate change impacts. Studies from USC have found that:

- Latinos have a 1 in 3 chance of living in a census tract that is highly impacted by greenhouse gas pollution vs. those of European ancestry who have a 1 in 14 chance.
- People of color are more likely to be nearest GHG emitting facilities with high emissions of co-pollutants such as particulate matter (PM). Overall, people of color experience over 70% more PM emissions within 2.5 miles of major GHG emitters.
- Throughout the state, people of color face a 50 percent higher risk of cancer from ambient concentrations of air pollutants, such as particulate matter, listed under the Clean Air Act.

ISSUE

What California's past leadership on climate change has overlooked in the evaluation and implementation of climate change policies is that GHG reduction has local impacts. In having a primary focus on large-scale impacts such as tempering the rise in global temperatures and holding off countless natural disasters, fundamental health and air quality benefits have been complimentary, but not core to the goals of the program. The state's efforts to combat climate change have focused primarily on reducing carbon with indirect attention to paid to how these efforts might worsen or ameliorate local air quality for those Californians living next to GHG emissions sources.

The need to improve local air quality, in addition to reducing GHGs, is a staple of the environmental justice climate platform and requires access to emissions data, greater transparency from state agencies regulating polluters, and for our elected representatives to have a role in reviewing progress and making recommendations to improve the program.

While reducing GHGs will help to counter a global issue and in turn benefit all Californians, policies that do not prioritize reductions at sources that also emit hazardous air pollution are likely to result in significant lost public health opportunities – especially for the state's most vulnerable populations. Increased transparency and public accountability through elected leaders can address the need for direct community engagement in the policymaking process and lift the real on the ground issues faced by disadvantaged populations.

In order for California to remain an economic and environmental leader the state will need to also be a leader on issues related to equity. Placing the health and economic impacts of climate policy on vulnerable populations as an afterthought will stunt the state's prosperity. A greater degree of transparency and investment in California's environmentally and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations has the potential to yield significant climate, economic, public health and workforce development opportunity to communities struggling from environmental and economic blight.

BILL SUMMARY

AB 197 (E. Garcia) brings about greater equity, transparency, public accountability and focus to future climate change policies. The bill does the following:

- Creates a Joint Legislative Committee on Climate Change made up of 3 members of the Assembly and 3 members of the Senate. The committee will ascertain facts and make recommendations to the Legislature on the state's programs and policies related to climate change.
- Add 2 ex-officio non-voting members from the legislature to the state Air Resources Board to create greater public oversight.
- Requires the state Air Resources Board to consider adopting measures to meet GHG emissions limits based on a prioritization to address both GHG and local air pollution.
- Places a 6-year term on Air Resources Board members, they may be reappointed and must be reapproved by Senate Rules committee.

Support

- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- California Environmental Justice Alliance
- California League of Conservation Voters

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Carlos Gonzalez, Policy Director
State Capitol, Room 4162
Carlos.Gonzalez@asm.ca.gov
(916) 319-2056