AB 1866
SUPPORT
March 12, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
1020 N Street, Room 164
Sacramento, CA 94814

RE: **AB 1866** - Idle Oil Well Cleanup - SUPPORT

To the Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources ~ Chair Bryan, Vice Chair Flora, and Assembly Members Bauer-Kahan, Friedman, Hoover, Kalra, Mathis, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Wicks, and Wood:

AB 1866 SUPPORT

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On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express our strong support for AB 1866, a bill to protect Californians from the growing impacts of dangerous oil and gas wells across the state. The “polluter pays” principle protects Californians and guides California’s environmental laws; AB 1866 will help hold oil companies accountable for their legal and financial cleanup obligations.

California’s 40,000 idle oil and gas wells, and 60,000 active wells, pose a serious threat to our health, environment, and climate. Frontline communities have suffered from leaking wells, causing harm to their health. New research shows that many idle wells leak toxic chemicals like benzene, a known human carcinogen with no safe level of exposure. Inspectors have also found methane leaking at explosive levels, putting nearby residents at risk. These methane leaks—present in an estimated two-thirds of unplugged wells—worsen our climate crisis and undermine our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This is a massive fiscal threat as well. The oil industry has failed to set aside enough financial resources to meet its obligation to plug these wells, clean up pollution, and restore the surface to its natural condition. Californians have long borne the industry’s externalized costs to their health, water, and air, and taxpayers have already forked over millions to clean up their wells, while the oil industry chooses to forego their cleanup obligations to fill shareholder pockets with exorbitant profits. And as oil production continues to wind down in the state, the risk of stranded assets grows. Should companies attempt to walk away from their financial obligations, the multibillion-dollar burden will fall yet again to the public, devastating state coffers. Delay and inaction only increase the risk here.

AB 1866 is a much-needed overhaul to the state’s existing idle well requirements. Current law allows operators the option to pay a nominal fee to avoid plugging wells. This bill would instead require all operators to start plugging a significant portion of their wells each year. The bill places the strongest requirements on the largest producers, those companies that have historically benefited the most from California’s lax requirements. Importantly, AB 1866 will also help workers transition from a declining industry by creating thousands of jobs in plugging and remediation in areas most affected by the state’s transition away from fossil fuel production.

Californians, especially communities that have historically suffered disproportionate harms from oil and gas pollution, will benefit from better health and safety, reduced air pollution, and job creation. We strongly support AB 1866 and urge you to pass this vitally important bill.

Signed,

350 Bay Area Action
350 Conejo / San Fernando Valley
350 Humboldt
350 Sacramento
350 South Bay Los Angeles
350 Southland Legislative Alliance
350 Ventura County Climate Hub
Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Asian Pacific Environmental Network
Azul
Bay Area-System Change not Climate Change
Black Women for Wellness
Breast Cancer Action
California Environmental Voters
California Nurses for Environmental Health and Justice
California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG)
CALPIRG Students
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
Central California Environmental Justice Network
Central Valley Air Quality Coalition
CERBAT.us
Chop Wood, Carry Water Daily Actions
Citizen Climate Lobby Santa Cruz
CleanEarth4Kids.org
Climate Action California
Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas (CFROG)
Climate Hawks Vote
Climate Health Now
Climate Reality Bay Area
Climate Reality Project Monterey Bay CA
Climate Reality Project Orange County Chapter
Climate Reality Project San Diego
ClimateBrunch
Coalition for Clean Air
Communities for a Better Environment
Community Environmental Council
Corporate Ethics International
Earth Justice Ministries
Earthjustice
ECO Team
Elders Climate Action (ECA) Northern California (NorCal) Chapter
Elders Climate Action (ECA) Southern California (SoCal) Chapter
Elected Officials to Protect America - Code Blue
Endangered Habitats League
Environment California
Environmental Defense Center
Environmental Protection Information Center
Environmental Working Group
Esperanza Community Housing Corporation
FACTS Families Advocating for Chemical and Toxics Safety
Food & Water Watch
Fossil Free California
FracTracker Alliance
Fridays for Future Fresno
Fridays For Future Sacramento
Friends of the Earth
Glendale Environmental Coalition
Good Neighbor Steering Committee of Benicia
Greenpeace USA
Ground Game LA
Indivisible San Jose
Indivisible South Bay LA
La Jolla Environmental Action
Labor Network for Sustainability
Los Angeles Climate Reality Project
Los Padres ForestWatch
Lutheran Office of Public Policy-California
Manhattan Beach Huddle
Mothers Out Front
Natural Resources Defense Council
NextGen California
Northridge Indivisible
Oil and Gas Action Network
Pacific Environment
Pelican Media
Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action (PICA)
Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles
Physicians for Social Responsibility/Sacramento
Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California
Planning and Conservation League
Presente.org
Protect Playa Now
Queers X Climate
Redeemer Community Partnership
RootsAction.org
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
San Joaquin Valley Democratic Club
SanDiego350
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
Sequoia ForestKeeper
Sierra Club CA
Society of Fearless Grandmothers - Santa Barbara
STAND-LA Coalition
Stand.earth
Sunflower Alliance
Sunrise Movement Long Beach
Sunrise Movement Los Angeles
The Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment
The Climate Center
Third Act SoCal
West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs
West LA Democratic Club
Youth Climate Strike Los Angeles
Youth For Earth