



Achieving Energy Justice & Real Climate Solutions in California: Principles for Equitable Policymaking

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California climate policy has put the needs of lower-income communities and communities of color on the “back burner” for decades. Our state has made progress toward the emission targets through piecemeal approaches, incentives, and focusing on new developments. By avoiding the hard conversations about environmental justice, however, California has also missed out on all of the benefits an environmental and economic transformation led by impacted communities could bring. No where is that missed opportunity more apparent than in building decarbonization work.

By focusing on technology over people, on small wins versus transformational vision, on piecemeal approaches over integrated solutions, the building decarbonization work in California is a foreboding tale of how avoiding conversations about justice can frustrate advocacy campaigns. Campaigns for all-electric building standards have faltered, not because decarbonization is not a laudable goal - but because the campaigns had the fatal flaw of leaving behind the very communities whose voices could have made a difference in the solutions lifted up and the effectiveness of the strategy.

Our organizations work to help lower-income people and people of color in California access affordable housing, prevent displacement, achieve health equity, benefit from California’s clean energy transition, and have a meaningful voice in decisions that will impact them. Despite the positive intentions of many policymakers and advocates, we feel that California is missing a critical lens of **ENERGY JUSTICE** in decisions that will impact the very people we hope will benefit from our work the most. Our work will continue to falter if we do not step back and address equity and justice.

In the interest of helping inform meaningful policy moving forward, we have come together to outline the following principles for equitable decision-making:.

- **The first priority must be keeping power on and keeping people housed.** Millions of Californians are facing the uncertainty of power shut offs due to failure to pay part or all of their bills during the COVID-19 pandemic, and millions more may be at risk of shut offs if we increase costs beyond what they can afford. Any policy affecting energy must be centered on ensuring electricity service stays on for residential ratepayers, and that any potential costs for the clean energy transition can be offset by incentives or other programs. We must also recognize and mitigate the potential for energy policies to further displacement for

populations at-risk of losing housing, or of negatively impacting the affordability and availability of housing moving forward.

- **A just transition will provide “High Road” jobs and meet basic needs.** Working for energy justice also means building high road jobs and opening up sustainable jobs for minority, women and people of color contractors and workers. In addition, pursuing energy justice means incorporating the needs of labor and the working class to build a transition that meets all people’s basic needs.
- **Equitable policy means all ratepayers benefit.** Pursuing policies that address the concerns of those most vulnerable to negative impacts, and with the highest barriers to adoption, will ensure everyone benefits. We cannot call a policy equitable that fails to do anything to help the ratepayers who need it the most.
- **Energy is a public good.** Energy justice for all requires that energy and the systems that create and distribute energy are a public good, democratized at all levels and not market driven.
- **Understanding the urgency of the public health and climate crisis - we must not rush to false solutions.** Communities that are most at risk of climate impacts are already impacted by systemic racism and disinvestment. Any work to confront the climate or public health crisis must center their needs - which sometimes means investing more time in designing policy and planning for programs in order to facilitate smooth implementation. While it seems counterintuitive, taking time for meaningful community engagement will lead to us more rapidly achieving our goals by identifying intersectional solutions that help reduce emissions more rapidly, increasing rates of adoption, preemptively identifying and planning for barriers, and building a broader base of community support for advocacy efforts.
- **Cost impacts must be analyzed at a more nuanced level, and solutions must not have regressive impacts.** Many cost impact studies are aggregated, or focus on a “typical” customer. For example, many building decarbonization studies claim that residential rates will go down, however fail to account for ratepayers who currently do not use gas for all current appliances because they do not own those appliances or use other fuel sources to power them, or fail to account for the dynamics of funding affordable housing developments. In order to inform equitable decisions, any cost impact studies must center the ratepayers that are lowest income to ensure we fully understand how decisions will impact them, and analyses must reflect how people are living in their homes now. Further, solutions must not regressively impact lower-income people, who have relatively low per capita emissions impacts, either through direct costs or costs passed through to ratepayers through implementation.
- **There is no “one size fits all” or “low hanging fruit” solution.** The current state of housing and energy delivery varies significantly region-by-region, and even within communities. What will work for one household in one community may not work for a similar household in another community. Equitable energy policies must follow the lead of community leaders and allow for variation based on local needs. Even policies that only focus on new buildings have fatal flaws that will negatively impact lower-income communities and workers without a change in course.
- **Energy policy must be informed and led by community experts and community organizers who are paid to do that critical work.** The people currently working to address challenges in communities are the experts on how to best design a policy that will help - and not harm - the communities we intend to benefit. Bringing in those community experts early to inform any policy direction or resources allocation will ensure that our work is as strategic and far-reaching as possible. We must recognize the loss of trust among communities who have continued to be left behind and harmed by policymakers, agencies, utilities, and

advocates for decades. Organizing amongst lower-income people of color is a crucial component to energy justice and if resourced well, will catapult the transition to a just, meaningful, and sustainable solution. Giving space for this work requires time and flexibility, and - above all - meaningful resources for the groups managing the critical community engagement processes.

- **Make space for building allies and unity.** The infrastructure and systemic transition we are undertaking is large in scale. To meet this scope and speed of change, we understand the need and opportunity to build allies and unity across sectors and movements under the leadership of lower-income people and communities of color. Resourcing ally and unity building efforts is crucial.
- **No Sacrifice Zones - be intentional about benefits and burdens.** Energy justice means that no group of people are sacrificed for Californian's access to energy and minimum harm is done to the environment. This means communities seeking justice in California also see their role as working for mining democracy, and an end to the enslavement of children or any people for mining of minerals needed to create renewable energy.
- **The goal is resilient communities and energy systems.** This means pursuing integrated solutions that focus on improving public health by reducing air pollution and exposure to toxics while also generating clean energy. This also means investing in an energy system that will not sacrifice public safety through wildfires and power shut-offs, and prepares our communities for the impacts of climate change.