



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Vince Fong
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 4630
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 297 – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Fong:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we support your Assembly Bill 297, which extends the CAL FIRE's ability to offer advance payments of up to 25 percent of the total grant reward from its Wildfire Prevention Grants program to January 1, 2034. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each member county.

Mitigation of wildfire risk is of paramount importance to communities in the wildland-urban interface statewide. CAL FIRE's recently-updated, draft Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps indicate a 14.6 percent increase in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) acreage in the state responsibility area (SRA) alone since 2007, most of which was shifted from land that was designated as Moderate Fire Hazard Severity fifteen years ago.¹ The maps represent a sobering view of how dramatically the state's wildfire patterns and potential impacts have been exacerbated by climate change and inattention to fuels treatment. The new maps are just another indicator of California's ever-worsening fire hazard conditions and the urgent need to expedite wildfire risk mitigation at the community and parcel level.

AB 297 would ensure that projects funded by CAL FIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grants program can continue to receive advance payments through January 1, 2034. This will help expedite wildfire mitigation programs such as fuels reduction, community fuel breaks and home hardening education, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities that need funding assistance the most.

¹ *Fire Hazard Severity Zones in State Responsibility Area (November 21, 2022) (2022) California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection*. Available at: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/ujtbj2zg/fhsz-in-sra-acreage-change.pdf> (Accessed: February 1, 2023).

The Honorable Vince Fong
Assembly Bill 297
February 1, 2023
Page 2

For these reasons, RCRC supports your AB 297. Please do not hesitate to contact me at sheaton@rcrcnet.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

STACI HEATON
Senior Policy Advocate