



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

April 20, 2023

The Honorable Ben Allen
Member, California State Senate
1021 O Street, Room 6610
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Senate Bill 571 – Oppose Unless Amended
As Amended March 21, 2023**

Dear Assembly Member Allen:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we respectfully oppose unless amended your Senate Bill 571, which requires, as condition of development in a High or Very High Hazard Severity Zone, submittal of an evacuation plan, as defined. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties.

The housing crisis in California has been well documented, with the Department of Housing and Community Development estimating that an additional 70,000 affordable residential units are needed each year. As the gap between housing need and available stock continues to widen, climate related impacts are increasing pressure on developers and local governments to determine appropriate housing sites that are not only affordable with increased mitigation measures, but also have a lower risk for catastrophic natural disaster, including wildfire.

State land use policy must balance the contrasting pressures of protecting California's unique biodiversity, meeting growing housing needs, and accepting the impacts of construction in a state that *will* have more devastating wildfires. This needs to be done in a manner that brings all stakeholders together to break the policy silos. In 2019, RCRC participated in a robust and diverse workgroup for nearly two years to inform the language in Senate Bill 182 (Jackson), which would have created a framework for local government permitting and residential development in fire-prone areas of the state. The top three most devastating fires to ravage California happened wholly in RCRC member counties. Our communities also face the same development pressures as suburban and urban jurisdiction, struggling to bring affordable housing to our residents. We are committed to being an integral part of the wildfire and land use solution.

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Unfortunately, SB 571 is not only overly broad, impacting most of the state (56 of the 58 counties have Fire Hazard Severity Zones), but also equates fire risk with fire hazard, ignoring the practical aspects of building anywhere in California. But, most detrimental to any growth in housing or commercial expansion are the bill's implications on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) processes, which will surely lead to litigation abuse and further stifling of development attempts. SB 571 lacks a holistic prospective that only comes from engaging with the local jurisdictions, subject matter experts and developer community tasked with implementing the provisions of this bill. The labyrinth of existing policy in fire safety, housing development and CEQA make it even more imperative that the conversation include the perspectives of all of those affected.

We appreciate your willingness to discuss the concerns of local governments, however, until we have a comprehensive discussion that includes stakeholders from all aspects of government, as well as the developer community, we must continue to oppose your SB 571. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at trhine@rcrcnet.org or (916) 447-4806.

Sincerely,



TRACY RHINE
Senior Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Anna Caballero, Chair, Senate Governance and Finance
Committee
Members of the Senate Governance and Finance Committee
Jonathan Peterson, Consultant, Senate Governance and Finance Committee
Ryan Eisberg, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus