



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

March 14, 2023

The Honorable Jim Patterson
Member, California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Room 4310
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 692 – SUPPORT
As Introduced February 13, 2023**

Dear Assembly Member Patterson:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we support your Assembly Bill 692, which expedites fire safety improvements for subdivisions that are at significant fire risk and lack a secondary egress route. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each of those member counties.

Assembly Bill 2911 (Chapter 641, 2018) requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) to make recommendations to improve the fire safety of existing housing subdivisions that are at significant fire risk and without a secondary egress route. Those recommendations may include, but are not limited to, creating secondary access or improving the existing access road.

Less than two months after AB 2911 was signed into law, the deadly Camp Fire tore through the City of Paradise (Butte County), killing 86 people and destroying nearly 14,000 residences. Notwithstanding capacity problems, the City of Paradise had four routes to get residents out of town in the event of an emergency; however, many other communities only have one egress route. While secondary egress routes may exist for some communities, they may be far narrower than the primary route, barred by a locked gate, or have limited access such that residents would be unable to use the route in the event of a fire.

AB 692 builds upon the foundation laid by AB 2911 by exempting from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) fire safety egress projects where the Board has suggested creation of a secondary egress route. Aside from expediting construction

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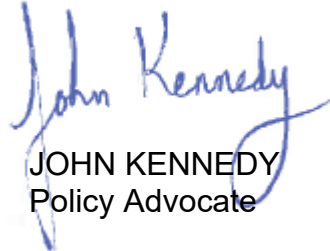
of new roads recommended by the Board, AB 692 also helps implement the Board's suggestions to remove barriers and improve existing exit routes.

While CEQA provides public disclosure and environmental mitigation benefits, it can also add considerable costs and delay project completion, especially if the project's compliance is challenged through litigation. Many communities lacking secondary egress routes are located in rural counties where scarce resources are needed for project construction. Furthermore, the increasing risk of catastrophic wildfires justifies expediting projects that may be vital for saving lives in future fires.

It should be noted that AB 692 is narrowly tailored to apply to subdivisions of 30 units or more and prohibits use of the CEQA exemption when a project contains a wetland or riparian area or would harm species protected by federal, state, or local laws. Notwithstanding the CEQA exemption, projects will be required to comply with other applicable environmental laws. Also, local agencies will be required to hold a noticed public meeting and respond to public comments on proposed projects.

For the above reasons, RCRC supports your AB 692. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jkennedy@rcrcnet.org.

Sincerely,



JOHN KENNEDY
Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Luz Rivas, Chair, Assembly Natural Resources Committee
Members of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee
Lawrence Lingbloom, Chief Consultant, Assembly Natural Resources Committee
Casey Dunn, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus