



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

May 24, 2022

The Honorable Ben Allen
Chair, Senate Environmental Quality Committee
State Capitol, Room 3230
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 1154 – SUPPORT
As Amended January 12, 2022**

Dear Senator Allen:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we are pleased to support Assembly Bill 1154, which expedites fire safety improvements for subdivisions that are at significant fire risk and lack a secondary egress route. RCRC is an association of thirty-nine rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each member county.

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 1154 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 of new roads recommended by the Board, AB 1154 also helps implement the Board's suggestions to remove barriers and improve existing exit routes.

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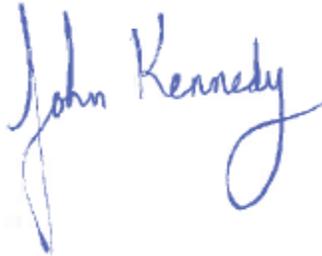
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While CEQA provides public disclosure and environmental mitigation benefits, it can also add considerable costs and delay project completion, especially if the project's compliance is challenged through litigation. Many communities lacking secondary 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 1154 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 respectfully requests your "Aye" vote when this measure is heard before your committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me at jkennedy@rcrcnet.org or (916) 447-4806 with any questions.

Sincerely,



JOHN KENNEDY
Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Jim Patterson, Member of the State Assembly
The Honorable Megan Dahle, Member of the State Assembly
Members of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee
Genevieve Wong, Consultant, Senate Environmental Quality Committee
Scott Seekatz, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus