



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES  
OF CALIFORNIA

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Anthony Portantino  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
California State Capitol, Room 412  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 1717 (Aguiar-Curry) — OPPOSE  
As Amended May 19, 2022**

Dear Senator Portantino:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we regretfully oppose Assembly Bill 1717, authored by Assembly Member Cecilia Aguiar-Curry. This measure would expand the definition of “public works” to include fuel reduction work paid for in part or whole by public funds, thereby, requiring payment of prevailing wage. RCRC is an association of thirty-nine rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each of those member counties.

Over the past several years, California’s wildfire seasons have grown both longer and more severe each year, as climate change has exacerbated the decades-overdue need for better vegetation management and fuels treatment strategies around communities in the wildland urban interface (WUI). Many of these communities are socioeconomically disadvantaged, with all 26 of California’s economically disadvantaged counties containing lands designated as high or very high fire hazard severity zones, and are dependent on public funding such as grants from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to implement community fuels treatment and fire mitigation projects to safeguard their communities from wildfires. One of the most impacted counties is Lake County, which suffers from disastrous wildfire events almost annually, yet has precious little resources to dedicate to fire mitigation efforts.

The ability to utilize GGRF and other public dollars through programs like California Climate Investments has afforded rural local governments the ability to undertake such vital projects as clearing dead and dying trees from critical infrastructure and residential properties during California’s recent tree mortality epidemic, as well as completing community wildfire mitigation projects in concert with local fire prevention organizations to help safeguard residents from the impacts of devastating wildfires. Even still, many rural counties in

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socioeconomically disadvantaged areas could benefit from assistance accessing public, competitive grant funding to help initiate fire mitigation projects because they lack the staffing and financial ability to compete with more robustly resourced counties.

As fire-prone counties continue to seek ways to maximize their ability to safeguard their residents from the devastation of wildfires, it seems ill-timed to introduce additional barriers to implementation of fire mitigation projects in communities that desperately need public funds to complete these projects. AB 1717 would increase the cost of crucial fire mitigation projects around communities and critical infrastructure by including these projects in the definition of "public works," thus subjecting them to prevailing wage. RCRC has long advocated for increased training and development of a local forest management and wildfire prevention workforce. It is vital that the state focus on creating a more robust forest resilience workforce in rural, disadvantaged communities before pursuing a measure like AB 1717, which would simply drive up costs of the scarce forest workforce currently in place while dramatically slowing the pace and scale of vegetation treatment projects on the ground.

Furthermore, AB 1717 will delay many other publicly funded projects done in conjunction with state, local and federal governments by shrinking those dollars and limiting the scope and number of projects that can be done. The state will need to commit to increased funding for projects done by local governments and in concert with local organizations such as fire safe councils and resource conservation districts if there is any hope of meeting California's crucial wildfire mitigation goals.

For the above reasons, RCRC opposes AB 1717 and respectfully requests your "No" vote when the measure comes before your committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [sheaton@rcrcnet.org](mailto:sheaton@rcrcnet.org) to discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton", with a stylized flourish at the end.

STACI HEATON  
Senior Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Member of the State Assembly  
Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee  
Ashley Ames, Consultant, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Kirk Feely, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus