



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

April 16, 2019

The Honorable Chris Holden
Chair, Assembly Utilities & Energy Committee
State Capitol, Room 5132
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 1516 (Friedman) – SUPPORT
As Amended March 28, 2019**

Dear Assembly Member Holden:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to express our support for Assembly Bill 1516, authored by Assembly Member Laura Friedman, which makes various changes to improve California's fire prevention policies including its defensible space requirements. RCRC is an association of thirty-six rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties.

RCRC member counties contain more than 70 percent of the State's forested lands, including the vast majority of both the State Responsibility Area and National Forest System lands. RCRC member counties have suffered most of the devastating wildfires over the past decade and include 8 of the 10 high hazard tree mortality counties, giving our membership an acute understanding of the importance of wildfire protection measures such as maintenance of defensible space around homes in the wildland urban interface. We also recognize that many homeowners do not adequately maintain their defensible space, whether by choice or because they are financially or physically unable to do so, even after they are inspected by the State and urged to reach compliance with state mandates.

We believe AB 1516 will improve defensible space and compliance with defensible space mandates in a number of ways. First, by establishing a 0-5 feet noncombustible zone from structures recommended by fire professionals based on investigations of recent fires and referenced in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE's) 45-day report to the Governor, AB 1516 reduces risk of ignition to homes in high fire hazard severity zones. AB 1516 also codifies CAL FIRE's goal to inspect every structure in the State Responsibility Area at least once every three years, reinforcing the State's commitment to enforcing defensible space mandates. AB 1516

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improves training of local defensible space inspectors and provide options for conservation corps, resource conservation districts, and fire safe councils to conduct defensible space work when a homeowner cannot or would not do the work, which is vital in rural communities where many residents are elderly and indigent and cannot always do the work themselves. AB 1516 also helps prevent future ignitions near powerlines by requiring the use of "right tree right place" for future planting under electrical lines in high fire hazard areas. Finally, AB 1516 requires CAL FIRE to provide vital assistance to local governments including water and power utilities to help prevent fire and institute appropriate vegetation management.

For the above reasons, RCRC respectfully requests your 'Aye' vote when this measure is heard before your Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton", written in a cursive style.

STACI HEATON
Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: The Honorable Laura Friedman, Member of the State Assembly
Members of the Assembly Utilities & Energy Committee
Consultant, Assembly Utilities & Energy Committee
Katie Sperla, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus