

INDIVISIBLE CA STATESTRONG



August 13, 2024

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

To:
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks , Chair, Assembly Committee on Appropriations

CC:
Assemblymember Kate Sanchez (V.Chair)
Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula
Assemblymember Isaac Bryan
Assemblymember Wendy Carillo,
Assemblymember Lisa Calderon,
Assemblymember Diane Dixon,
Assemblymember Timothy Grayson,
Assemblymember Matt Haney,
Assemblymember Gregg Hart,
Assemblymember Jim Patterson
Assemblymember Gail Pellerin.
Assemblymember Tri Ta,
Assemblymember Carlos Villapudua

**Re: SB-610 (Wiener) Fire prevention: wildfire mitigation area: defensible space:
State Fire Marshal – OPPOSE**

Dear Chair Wicks and Members of the Assembly Committee on Appropriations

Indivisible CA: StateStrong, a coalition of 60 Indivisible groups that represent over 60,000 constituents across the state of California, OPPOSES SB 610.

On behalf of thousands of our members and supporters in California, the undersigned organizations are writing to express our deep concern with **Senate Bill 610 (Wiener) which will fundamentally reshape California fire and housing policy and make Californians more vulnerable to wildfire.** The bill would completely abolish the Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps that guide mitigation strategies and land use planning for development in fire-risk areas. The bill would also centralize all decision making in the hands of just one person: the State Fire Marshal.

SB 610's stated intent is to increase development in high-risk areas, and—quite shockingly—do so without existing regulations designed to protect communities. The bill's fact sheet inappropriately dismisses such regulations as “costly building standards, increased disaster planning and mitigation requirements.”¹ This proposal is directly at odds with the recommendations of the Governor's Strike Force, which urged the state to “begin to deprioritize new development in areas of the most extreme fire risk. In turn, more urban and lower-risk regions in the state must prioritize increasing infill development and overall housing production.”² We were therefore shocked and surprised to see this bill—which was introduced near the end of the legislative process via a “gut-and-amend” tactic—backed by the Governor's Office.

SB 610 perpetuates the false narrative that new large-scale development in fire risk areas is safe. While mitigation such as home hardening and defensible space can make homes in fire zones *less risky*, such measures only *reduce* the risk of burning. For instance, an analysis conducted in the aftermath of the Camp Fire showed that only 44 percent of homes built to current Chapter 7A building codes survived, meaning 56 percent were destroyed (and only 11.5 percent of older homes built before 1997 survived).³ Evacuation routes are also already stressed past the breaking point.⁴ The “build first, ask questions later” approach of the past is causing extreme personal and economic hardship on Californians, and this bill would make these existing problems far worse.

New development in high-risk areas supported by SB 610 will increase ignition risk, as we already know that 95 to 97 percent of contemporary wildfires in California are caused by human sources.⁵ The legislative analysis for SB 610 in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee similarly notes: “Residential developments in the WUI

¹ Senator Scott Wiener, Senate Bill 610 Fact Sheet (June 14, 2024). Available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oLjNCnDjiOLZPu5gAMtshfc-LwLGi_iF/view.

² A Report of Governor Newsom's Strike Force, *Wildfires and Climate Change: California's Energy Future* (April 12, 2019). Available at <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Wildfires-and-Climate-Change-California%E2%80%99s-Energy-Future.pdf>

³ Knapp, Eric E., et al. “Housing arrangement and vegetation factors associated with single-family home survival in the 2018 Camp Fire, California.” *Fire Ecology* 17 (2021). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42408-021-00117-0>

⁴ Megan Diskin and Evan Wylodge, “Here's why so many California wildfire evacuations turn into deadly traffic jams,” *Desert Sun* (April 25, 2019). Available at <https://www.desertsun.com/in-depth/news/local/2019/04/25/california-wildfire-evacuation-routes-traffic-jams/3238313002/>

⁵ Balch, Jennifer K., et al. “Human-started wildfires expand the fire niche across the United States.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114.11 (2017). Available at <https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.1617394114>

and other wildfire prone areas can significantly increase the risks of wildfires and the risk to public safety.”

New development supported by SB 610 will not help solve the affordable housing crisis, but it will make Californians less safe. Since 2016 more than 200 people in California have been killed in wildfires, more than 50,000 structures have been burned down, hundreds of thousands have had to evacuate their homes and endure power outages, and millions have been exposed to unhealthy levels of smoke and air pollution.⁶ New development in high-risk areas will obstruct existing communities’ evacuation routes and lead to more disruption of natural fire regimes, degradation of California’s ecosystems and wildlife as well as increased medical emergencies and premature death of vulnerable community members.⁷

SB 610 will do nothing to address the availability or affordability of insurance. As The California Department of Insurance’s Climate Insurance Working Group observes: **“Land use decisions in the past are one of the causes of insurability problems today . . . housing that burns down [] is not an affordable or equitable option”**⁸ Nonetheless, the fact sheet for SB 610 incorrectly suggests that changing the names of very high fire hazard severity zones to the more benign sounding “wildfire mitigation areas” will somehow help reduce insurance rates. The best way to decrease insurance rates is to actually *reduce risk* by supporting home hardening programs for existing communities and *limiting* new development in high-risk areas.

Cities and counties play a critical role in reducing wildfire risk, and existing law allows them to designate areas as fire zones (so long as the hazard designation equals or exceeds the state hazard rating) and implement wildfire mitigation regulations based on scientific information and on-the-ground conditions. SB 610 would remove this long-standing authority and fully centralize such designations and decision making in the hands of the State Fire Marshal, an unelected official. **SB 610 would undermine local accountability and government transparency, and increase the likelihood of political interference in state and local wildfire policy.**

Cities and counties can and should continue to plan for new development in safer areas. As Los Angeles County has shown, regional housing needs allocation goals can all be met by directing new development outside of fire zones. California does not need to keep building in high-risk areas to provide safe housing for all.

SB 610 was introduced last month via a **“gut-and-amend” tactic such that there is insufficient time for stakeholders and elected officials to fully review this bill** or propose amendments. **We urge you to table this bill until next year and**

⁶ Reid-Wainscoat et al. *The True Cost of Sprawl: Bad Planning Harms People, Wildlife, and the Climate* (March 2024). Available at <https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/urban/pdfs/The-True-Cost-of-Sprawl-report.pdf>

⁷ Delfino, Ralph J., et al. "The relationship of respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions to the southern California wildfires of 2003." *Occupational and environmental medicine* 66.3 (2009). Available at <https://oem.bmj.com/content/66/3/189>.

Connolly, Rachel, et al. "Mortality attributable to PM_{2.5} from wildland fires in California from 2008 to 2018." *Science Advances* 10.23 (2024). Available at: <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adl1252>

⁸ California Department of Insurance, Climate Working Group, “Protecting Communities, Preserving Nature, and Building Resiliency,” available at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/ccj/docs/climate-insurance-report.pdf>

instead engage with stakeholders on improving the state's fire and housing policies.

Delfino, Ralph J., et al. "The relationship of respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions to the southern California wildfires of 2003." *Occupational and environmental medicine* 66.3 (2009). Available at <https://oem.bmj.com/content/66/3/189>.

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Respectfully,

Indivisible CA State Strong, Jennifer Tanner, Organizer
JJTanner18@gmail.com

Cc: Chair, Vice Chair, all Committee members, Speakers Office

Indivisible CA: StateStrong, a coalition of the following Indivisible groups:

Change Begins With ME, Tama Becker-Varano
Cloverdale Indivisible, Vicky Groom
Contra Costa MoveOn, Sheila Fish
Feminists in Action Los Angeles (Indivisible CA 34 Womens), Jessica Craven
Indian Valley Indivisibles, Darrah Hopper
East Valley Indivisibles, Jason Goodman, leg committee
Hillcrest Indivisible, John Mattes
Indivisible 36, Joy Silver
Indivisible 41, Lecia Elzig
Indivisible Alta-Pasadena, Anita Ghazarian
Indivisible Auburn CA, Mark Rosen
Indivisible Beach Cities, Paula de Manuel
Indivisible CA 45, Susan Perlson
Indivisible CA-25 Simi Valley-Porter Ranch, Leanna Brand
Indivisible CA-43, Dana Hezek
Indivisible Claremont/Inland Valley, Laurie Pittman
Indivisible Colusa County, Jen Roberts
Indivisible East Bay, Larry Baskett
Indivisible Elmwood, Judith Stacey
Indivisible El Dorado Hills, Jenette Finch
Indivisible Euclid, Ellen Coffley
Indivisible Los Angeles, Elizabeth Rosen
Indivisible Manteca, Sue Escobar
Indivisible Marin, Susan Morgan
Indivisible Media City Burbank, Chas Castell
Indivisible Mendocino, Christie Olsen Day
Indivisible Normal Heights, Mala Wingard
Indivisible OC 46, Julie Herrick
Indivisible OC 48, Lubna Hammad
Indivisible Petaluma, Patrick Mundy

Indivisible Ross Valley, Sue Saunders
Indivisible Sacramento, Tina Cahill
Indivisible San Jose - Lugene Keene
Indivisible San Pedro, Peter Warren
Indivisible Santa Barbara, Keith Carlson
Indivisible Santa Cruz County, Faye Johnson
Indivisible Sausalito, Debbie Toizer
Indivisible Sebastopol, Ann Diev
Indivisible SF, Anna Krasner
Indivisible SF Peninsula and CA-14, Sophia Mahoney-Rohrl
Indivisible Sonoma County, Larry Martin
Indivisible South Bay LA, Doug Bender
Indivisible Stanislaus, Darleen Murphy
Indivisible Ventura, Adrienne Couter
Indivisible Westside L.A., Isabel Storey
Indivisible Yolo, Peggy Bernardy
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Livermore Indivisible, Helen Machuga
Los Angeles Indivisible, Scott Anderson
Mill Valley Community Action Network, L. Litvak
Orchard City Indivisible, Bruce Preville
Indivisible ReSisters Walnut Creek, Ogie Strogatz
Our Revolution Long Beach, Kathy Dasilva
Rooted in Resistance, Ruth Richardson
SFV Indivisible, Lori Howell
The Resistance Northridge, Kayla Owens
Together We Will Contra Costa, Alysia Gadde
TWW/Indivisible - Los Gatos, Stephanie Brown
Venice Resistance, Jed Pauker
Women's Alliance Los angeles, Bobbi Rubenstein
Yalla Indivisible, Lubna Hammad

Jennifer Tanner, Organizer, JJTanner18@gmail.com

Indivisible CA: StateStrong, a coalition of the following Indivisible groups:

All Rise Alameda	Indivisible Euclid
Building the Base Face to Face	Indivisible Lorin
Change Begins With ME	Indivisible Los Angeles
Cloverdale Indivisible	Indivisible Manteca
Contra Costa MoveOn	Indivisible Marin
Defending Our Future: Indivisible in CA	Indivisible Media City Burbank
52nd District	Indivisible Mendocino
East Valley Indivisibles	Indivisible Normal Heights
El Cerrito Progressives	Indivisible North Oakland Resistance
Feminists in Action Los Angeles (Indivisible CA 34 Womens)	Indivisible North San Diego County
Hillcrest Indivisible	Indivisible OC 46
Indi Squared	Indivisible OC 48
Indian Valley Indivisibles	Indivisible Petaluma
Indivisible 30/Keep Sherman	Indivisible Sacramento
Accountable	Indivisible San Bernardino
Indivisible 36	Indivisible San Jose
Indivisible 41	Indivisible San Pedro
Indivisible Auburn CA	Indivisible Santa Barbara
Indivisible Beach Cities	Indivisible Santa Cruz County
Indivisible CA-3	Indivisible Sausalito
Indivisible CA-7	Indivisible Sebastopol
Indivisible CA-25 Simi Valley-Porter Ranch	Indivisible SF
Indivisible CA-29	Indivisible SF Peninsula and CA-14
Indivisible CA-37	Indivisible Sonoma County
Indivisible CA-39	Indivisible South Bay LA
Indivisible CA-43	Indivisible Stanislaus
Indivisible Claremont/Inland Valley	Indivisible Suffragists
Indivisible Colusa County	Indivisible Ventura
Indivisible East Bay	Indivisible Westside L.A.
Indivisible El Dorado Hills	Indivisible Windsor
Indivisible Elmwood	Indivisible Yolo
	Indivisible: San Diego Central
	Indivisibles of Sherman Oaks

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Mill Valley Community Action Network
Mountain Progressives
Nothing Rhymes with Orange
Orchard City Indivisible
Orinda Progressive Action Alliance
Our Revolution Long Beach
RiseUp
Rooted in Resistance
Ross Valley Indivisible
San Diego Indivisible Downtown
SFV Indivisible
Tehama Indivisible
The Resistance Northridge
Together We Will Contra Costa
TWW/Indivisible - Los Gatos
Vallejo-Benicia Indivisible
Venice Resistance
Women's Alliance Los Angeles
Yalla Indivisible