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Contact: Kay Cuajunco, [510-302-0430 ext. 22](tel:510-302-0430)

Assembly Passes Two Bills To Increase Investments in Community Environmental Justice Solutions

Environmental Health Coalition says bills have potential to transform communities and rebuild neighborhoods

Sacramento, CA | June 2, 2015 — The California Assembly took a step towards increasing statewide support for environmental justice by passing two bills off the Assembly floor on Monday, June 1st. AB 1071 by Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) and Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (D-Imperial Valley) will create a program and enables polluters who violate environmental laws to use a portion of their fine to fund a community project. AB 1062 by Assemblymember Bonta (D-Oakland) will increase funding for the California Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Small Grant program. Both bills passed with majority bi-partisan votes on the Assembly floor Monday, June 1.

"Up and down California, disadvantaged communities have been burdened by pollution more than others," said Assembly Speaker Toni G. Atkins (D-San Diego). "With AB 1071, state agencies will make better use of existing tools designed to help neighborhoods address the impacts of pollution, ensuring that the public-health benefits reach the people who are impacted the most."

AB 1071 requires each Board, Department, and Office within the California Environmental Protection Agency to establish a Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs) policy to benefit environmental justice communities. Supplemental Environmental Projects are additional projects that benefit the environment and public health. AB 1071 would create a set of projects that can be funded directly in disadvantaged communities. AB 1071 passed with a vote of 70-0.

"These two bills have the potential to support infrastructure projects and transform communities that have historically struggled to resolve issues of pollution," says Georgette Gómez, associate director at San Diego-based Environmental Health Coalition. "We are pleased to see California moving these monumental conversations forward to protect and build healthy neighborhoods in areas traditionally neglected."

AB 1062 increases funding for CalEPA's Environmental Justice Small Grant program, which is one of very few that provides resources for community-based organizations working on the front lines of pollution and poverty in California. AB 1062 would require the Secretary of the CalEPA to disburse no less than 5 million dollars per year to the program, which currently has no permanent funding source and has given out less than \$2 million over a decade. AB 1062 passed with a vote of 63-1.

"It is time that we make environmental justice a top environmental priority for California," said Rob Bonta (D-Oakland). "AB 1062 will help provide the most vulnerable Californians with the tools they need to fight against environmental health hazards in their communities. I am pleased my colleagues in the Assembly agreed through their overwhelming support of the bill today. I am hopeful that the bill will continue through the Legislature and eventually help millions of Californians who deserve to breathe fresh

air, drink clean water, and live in toxic-free and healthy neighborhoods."

Amy Vanderwarker, co-coordinator of the California Environmental Justice Alliance, one of the co-sponsors of AB 1062 and one of several strong supporters on AB 1071, said, "These two bills represent policy solutions that directly benefit communities most impacted by environmental pollution and poverty. If signed into law, they will bring much needed investments to support community-led solutions in frontline communities across California. We applaud the Assembly for their leadership in passing these two measures."

AB 1062 and AB 1071 will now be sent to the Senate for consideration.

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California Environmental Justice Alliance is a statewide coalition of grassroots, environmental justice organizations building a movement among low-income communities and communities of color most impacted by environmental issues to demand change. www.caleja.org.

Environmental Health Coalition: Founded in 1980, Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) builds grassroots campaigns to confront the unjust consequences of toxic pollution, discriminatory land use and unsustainable energy policies. Visit us online at <http://www.environmentalhealth.org>.