



August 14, 2026

Submitted via email to: DACinquiries@calepa.ca.gov

Yana Garcia
Secretary for Environmental Protection
California Environmental Protection Agency
1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Public Comment on the CalEnviroScreen 5.0 2026 regarding San Rafael
Census Tracts 06041112202, 06041112203, and 06041112204**

Dear Secretary Garcia,

On behalf of the City of San Rafael, I urge CalEPA to postpone finalizing changes to CalEnviroScreen and take more time to integrate local and climate vulnerability data. We appreciate the intention to improve CalEnviroScreen 5.0, but the Canal neighborhood (via census tracts 06041112203, and 06041112204) remains excluded from the designation, and that outcome does not reflect the reality on the ground nor data from a variety of other sources, particularly as it relates to climate impacts.

The Canal neighborhood is one of the most under-resourced communities in the Bay Area. Home to 13,000 to 15,000 residents, roughly 92 percent Hispanic, the Canal neighborhood carries a poverty rate near 35 percent, more than double the county rate. Per capita income is about \$23,644, and median household income is roughly \$49,000, against \$121,700 for Marin County, one of the most expensive places to live in the state. Half of renters live in overcrowded housing, and only 43 percent of adults hold a high school diploma, compared to 93 percent countywide.

The Canal Neighborhood faces unprecedented climate impacts. OEHHHA has acknowledged, in its response to comments on CalEnviroScreen 5.0, that climate risk is not yet reflected in the tool and committed to evaluating it in future versions. That admission is the heart of our concern. The methodology that decides which communities are disadvantaged cannot account for the defining hazard facing shoreline communities: a rising bay and the tidal flooding that follows. For the Canal, this is not a projection. Much of the neighborhood already sits at or below the level of the adjacent bay, protected only by aging infrastructure, and residents contend with

tidal flooding during king tides and storms today. In January, tides topped eight feet, flooded the neighborhood with bay water, submerging vehicles, flooding homes and businesses, and blocking evacuation routes. Numerous recent studies have shown that the Canal neighborhood is the most vulnerable in the Bay Area to the effects of sea level rise. To exclude the Canal neighborhood on a score that does not recognize these climate impacts specifically for climate related funding is a significant oversight.

The California Department of Water Resources designates the Canal as disadvantaged, and likely severely disadvantaged, on income alone. The federal Opportunity Zone program includes it, with three of San Rafael's five eligible tracts located in the Canal. It meets federal poverty thresholds for affordable housing investment. FEMA designates these census tracts as having a risk index higher than 99% of all other census tracts in the U.S. And under California's own AB 1550 and SB 535 framework, it already qualifies as a low-income priority population. When the primary tool used to address environmental inequities contradicts nearly every other state and federal measure applied to the same neighborhood, it requires a pause to determine the reasons for those contradictions and rectify them before the tool is used to determine eligibility for funding.

The exclusion of the Canal neighborhood breaks the investment pipeline. The City of San Rafael is a founding member of the Marin Climate Justice Collaborative, which received a \$996,390 Strategic Growth Council Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) grant to build climate resilience capacity in the Canal neighborhood and Marin City. In partnership with the lead agency, Canal Alliance, we achieved that grant's objectives, including Healthy Neighborhood Plans and a climate solutions inventory to prepare future projects. In awarding it, SGC recognized both communities as under-resourced.

Similarly, the City has been awarded Coastal Conservancy and iCARP grants for community-driven sea level rise planning based on the data showing these census tracts as disadvantaged and environmental justice communities. Yet because other grant sources such as the Transformative Climate Communities program rely on the narrower disadvantaged community designation rather than the broader under-resourced standard that governs RCC and other state resilience programs, the City and its partners cannot access SGC funding to carry that work into implementation. The state funded the planning but will not fund the implementation. Designating the Canal appropriately in CalEnviroScreen 5.0 would align these programs and let the pipeline function as intended. As proposed it will do the opposite.

The 2026 overlap provision does not resolve this. The designation includes tracts overlapping at least 25 percent with a 2022 disadvantaged community. Because the Canal was not designated in 2022, this offers no remedy, even as the need has deepened.

Our request.

There are solutions that bear taking more time to assess. We respectfully ask that CalEPA take more time to resolve conflicts with the new proposal and potential errors in

the data and consider the following to ensure truly disadvantaged communities are represented accurately and don't lose out on implementation funding:

1. **Carry Over Legacy CES 3.0 Qualifying Tracts.** Carrying over legacy DACs from CES 3.0 helps ensure continuity of funding for environmental justice communities. This is especially important given many neighborhood-level projects rely on sustained capital investments and institutional trust and ensures they don't get stranded after receiving planning grants.
2. **Adopt a supplemental pathway recognizing high-poverty, social vulnerability, and importantly, climate-hazard and flood-exposed communities** that fall below the CalEnviroScreen threshold due to the tool's omission of climate risk.

Other considerations to ensure adequate representation in the tool include the following:

1. Align the disadvantaged community and under-resourced community standards so communities can move from state-funded planning to implementation without being stranded.
2. Establish a ½-Mile Geographic Buffer Around DACs. Establishing a ½ mile buffer helps ensure more pollution-burdened communities are eligible as DACs. Environmental and climate-related health hazards—such as freeway corridors, industrial zones, and flooding from sea level rise—do not stop at census tract lines. A ½-mile buffer reflects public health literature on toxic exposure distances and prevents block-by-block inequities, while also mirroring statutory precedent in AB 1550 that explicitly recognizes low-income households within ½ mile of a DAC as priority populations.
3. Include the Top 25% Population Burdened Tracts. Including communities who rank at the highest 25% of the population characteristics helps ensure extremely low-income and marginalized communities are prioritized for key equity investments. These communities bear historic and continuing racial, economic, and health inequities exacerbated by the climate crisis.

The disadvantaged community designation is the state's authoritative statement about which communities need help most, and it governs access to billions of dollars in investment. SB 535 was written to reach exactly the communities the Canal neighborhood represents. California has already invested nearly one million dollars to build a climate resilience pipeline here. We ask CalEPA to take more time to dig into the data, include climate vulnerabilities, and consider the solutions above that would make that investment count.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome the chance to provide additional data and invite CalEPA staff to visit the Canal and see what the community the map is missing. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Colin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Colin
Mayor

cc. Damon Connolly, Assemblymember, District 12
 Mike McGuire, Senator, District 2
 Dennis Rodoni, Supervisor, Marin County District 4
 Sara Aminzadeh, Deputy Secretary for Federal Affairs, CNRA