



CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.



## THE COMMUNITY EQUITY INITIATIVE

### WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY EQUITY INITIATIVE?

Throughout California hundreds of thousands of people live in Disadvantaged, Unincorporated Communities (DUCs). DUCs range from urban pockets that are excluded from cities, to more remote, densely settled rural communities. Residents in these communities often live without the most basic features of a safe and healthy environment - potable drinking water, sewer systems, safe housing, public transportation, access to healthy food, water and provision of municipal services, such as sidewalks, streetlights and parks - due to decades of neglect and exclusion from formal decision making by city, county and state governments.

The Community Equity Initiative (CEI) is a multi-strategy effort designed to help DUCs develop into healthy and thriving places to live. The CEI was established to focus CRLA resources towards changing patterns of historic inequality in rural regions of California. We work alongside community leaders to raise awareness of DUCs, increase investment in community infrastructure, advocate for equitable development, promote environmental justice, guarantee fair representation and build leadership capacity, so that residents can engage meaningfully in decision-making that impacts their neighborhoods and their families.

### HOW DOES THE CEI MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

CEI staff work alongside DUC leaders to reverse long-standing patterns of exclusion and neglect in their communities. Through a combination of litigation, research, community-based advocacy and local leadership development, CEI finds innovative ways to address persistent challenges in DUCs. We then share the most promising strategies with a wide array of stakeholders: community-based organizations, policy advocates, law makers, government officials, and university-

based researchers throughout California and across the nation. In turn, these stakeholders mobilize their own resources to increase public awareness of the problems that impact DUCs, and to spotlight solutions that require broad-based efforts for change. Over time, CEI will have a cumulative effect on the well-being and livelihood of over 1 million California residents and millions more across the nation who will benefit indirectly from what is learned through our work statewide.

### WHERE DOES CEI FOCUS ITS EFFORTS?

Since the beginning phase of CEI in 2009, we have targeted the six counties of California's San Joaquin Valley, where more than half a million residents live in DUCs. This agriculturally rich region is home to some of the poorest communities in the nation.

In the past CEI has expanded support to other regions in the state that show historic patterns of inequality within unincorporated communities: The Coachella Valley and The Central Coast.



## CEI ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Improvements in Local Climate and Air Quality

- Educated California law makers on SB 244, landmark legislation that mandates inclusion of DUCs in comprehensive long term planning for the first time.
- Changed local land use practices in Tulare County to improve planning and investment in DUCs.
- Ensured that regional efforts to improve air quality, transportation and land use under SB 375 included consideration of DUCs.

### Improvements in Civic Engagement

- Ensured fair elections for Community Services District Boards in several San Joaquin Valley DUCs.
- Guided and supported new community-based organizations in several San Joaquin Valley communities in the counties of Kern, Fresno, Tulare, Merced, Madera and Stanislaus.
- Increased DUC resident participation and representation on local, county-level and regional boards and committees.
- Educated hundreds of DUC community members on their rights to participate in public decision-making and request public information.

### Improvements in Community Investment

- Secured planning funds for disadvantaged communities.
- Ensured development of a Safe Drinking Water Plan through successful litigation against the California Department of Public Health.
- Analyzed and published study on impact of “stimulus” funds on DUCs and identified change targets for improving equity in future funding decisions.
- We also won a lawsuit against city of Modesto, forcing them to provide sewer connection and sidewalks for our clients.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT CEI?

- **Visit** [www.crla.org](http://www.crla.org)
- **Click On:** Services and Programs-Special Initiatives-Community Equity Initiative
- **Sign-up** for our Rural Justice Updates
- **Contact** Alfred Hernandez, Program Director, Community Equity Initiative, [ahernandez@crla.org](mailto:ahernandez@crla.org) (661) 725-4350 x304

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT CEI?

### **Join us in the fight for justice. Get involved.**

- **Tell** your friends and family about CRLA
- **Sign-up** for our Rural Justice Updates
- **Donate** online at [www.crla.org](http://www.crla.org)
- **Host** a CRLA house party or office luncheon
- **Sponsor** a local CRLA fundraising event
- **Volunteer** at one of our local offices
- **Provide** pro bono counsel
- **Underwrite** a CRLA fellowship
- **Contact** our Development Department to learn more: [development@crla.org](mailto:development@crla.org)

#### 501 C(3) STATEMENT

Your contributions help CRLA provide outreach, community education and no-cost legal services to poor Californians and their families. CRLA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, so your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Please consult your tax preparer for details. CRLA's tax identification number is: 95-2428657.

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