



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, 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 an interdisciplinary effort designed to address and eliminate social, political and environmental factors that negatively impact DUCs. The CEI was established to focus CRLA resources towards changing this pattern of historic inequality. In partnership with PolicyLink and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, we are working 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 in DUCs, so that residents can engage meaningfully in decision-making processes that impact their neighborhoods and their families.

WHERE DOES THE CEI FOCUS ITS EFFORTS?

The first three-year phase of this initiative (2009-2011) targets the eight counties of California's San Joaquin Valley, with more than half a million residents living in DUCs. This agriculturally rich region is home to some of the poorest communities in the

nation. CRLA plans to replicate CEI strategies in other regions of the state that also show historic patterns of inequality within unincorporated communities: The Coachella Valley and The Central Coast.



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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 legal strategies, advocacy and local leadership development, the 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 then 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 in the San Joaquin Valley.

CEI ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Postponed annexation that sought to exclude a low- income, community of color (Matheny Tract) from the plan, until a proper analysis of annexation pros and cons was conducted and presented to Matheny Tract residents.
- Ensured fair elections for Community Services District Boards in several Fresno County DUCs.
- Guided and supported the start-up of community-based organizations in the DUCs of Tooleville, Laton, and Parklawn.
- Educated California law makers on four key pieces of legislation that would support investment in disadvantaged, unincorporated communities
- Successfully advocated for designated (regional) planning funds to be used exclusively for disadvantaged communities
- Increased participation and representation of several DUC leaders on the Fresno County committee that allocates community development block grants.
- Ensured language access at several community, county and other related meetings for Spanish-speaking residents.
- Educated hundreds of DUC community members on their rights to participate in public decision-making and request public information

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT CEI?

- **Visit** www.crla.org
- **Click On:** Services and Programs-Special Initiatives-Community Equity Initiative
- **Sign-up** for our Rural Justice Updates
- **Contact** Phoebe Seaton, Director, Community Equity Initiative

HOW CAN I SUPPORT THE CEI?

- **Donate** online or send financial contributions to:
- **Sponsor** a CEI staff attorney
- **Provide** pro bono counsel

CRLA DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
631 Howard Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105

Contact us at development@crla.org to learn more.

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.

PHOTOS BY DAVID BACON.

