The California Alliance for Community Energy (the Alliance) is a statewide network of activists and grassroots organizations committed to the support and defense of Community Choice energy programs that advance local clean energy for the environmental, economic, and social justice benefit of our communities.

Alliance members are deeply committed to the local benefits of decentralized clean energy resources, hence our advocacy for local Community Choice programs. To us, the “success” of a Community Choice program is seen in its ability to meet community needs above and beyond cheaper, greener energy—the community decision-making, local job creation, community resilience, energy independence, and equitable economic development that these programs can also achieve.

**2019 Challenges**

Despite a record number of Community Choice programs serving a growing portion of the state’s electricity demand, 2019 witnessed heightened attacks on Community Choice by both the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the State Legislature.

The CPUC’s late-2018 imposition of dramatic increases in the Power Charge Indifference Adjustment (PCIA) set the stage for 2019. The PCIA is an ongoing fee that forces Community Choice customers to pay for “departing load” costs incurred by the monopoly utilities. Likened to paying for the gas your electric vehicle doesn’t use, the PCIA undermines the competitive and financial viability of Community Choice programs and hence the benefits they can provide.

Another challenge in 2019 came in the form of a glut of legislative measures that threatened the ability of Community Choice agencies to establish innovative programs that meet local community needs. These bills increased the authority over Community Choice programs of the same utility-dominated CPUC that imposed the dramatic increase in PCIA fees.

To top off these challenges, the Governor rammed through the legislature a wildfire bailout bill, AB 1054, that strengthened the monopoly utilities. By shoring up this failing, criminally negligent utility model, the Governor and legislature undermined the decentralized energy model needed to provide energy resilience to all California communities.

**The Alliance Responds**

The Alliance responded to this past year’s challenges with a series of campaigns to defend Community Choice programs against the regulatory, legislative, and executive attacks they were facing. In doing so, we tripled our base to about a thousand supporters:

- **“Roll Back the CPUC Attack on Our Communities”** (Feb. - May).
  
  Through an organizational petition to legislative leadership and direct legislative outreach, the Alliance built pressure to demand a roll back of the CPUC’s PCIA decision.
Our May 1 petition to Senate and Assembly leadership was signed by 49 organizations. It was also supported by hundreds of letters sent by individual members of these organizations, attesting to the widespread public demand to protect Community Choice from the CPUC’s flagrantly hostile decision.

- **“Community Choice Bill of Rights”** (Feb. - March).
  The rights and responsibilities of Community Choice programs, granted under AB 117 (2002), took a major hit under the CPUC’s 2018 PCIA action. To restore and protect Community Choice programs from being further undermined, the Alliance developed the “Community Choice Bill of Rights”. This language sought multiple legislative changes that would roll back the PCIA decision and strengthen the financial and programmatic integrity of Community Choice programs.

- **“Stop the Legislative Coup Against Community Choice!”** (May - September).
  Facing continuing erosion of the autonomy and authority of Community Choice programs by nine separate bills in the 2019 Legislative session, the Alliance called out this tidal wave as a de facto “coup” against Community Choice. We created a member-led legislative working group to mobilize grassroots opposition, and over the legislative session, we launched ten different calls to action to our near-1000 Community Choice supporters. Thanks to this onslaught of opposition directed to statewide representatives, and to concerted efforts from the entire Community Choice ecosystem, only three of the original nine bills\(^1\) remain to be defeated in the 2020 session.

- **“Stop Newsom’s Gruesome Utility Bailout!”** (July)
  As mentioned above, Newsom pushed through a bailout of the investor-owned utilities in the last week before the legislative recess. We took a strong position against AB 1054 and fought it with four member blasts in three days. Not surprisingly, we lost the battle, and AB 1054 became law after a scant week of public debate.

**Looking Ahead: 2020 – An Energy Crossroads?**

By fall 2019, virtually all areas of the state had felt the pain of the IOUs’ unpredictable “planned power shutoffs,” severely threatening reliable electricity supply and particularly jeopardizing our most vulnerable communities. The importance of building a more equitable, resilient, community-responsive energy system cannot be overstated, and Community Choice programs are at the cutting edge of this transition.

Ensuring this transition is the mission of the Alliance, and one we expect to actively pursue throughout 2020.

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\(^1\) AB 56, SB 350 and SB 774.