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October 2, 2020

Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N Spring St, Room 1010
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: BIA-LAV Letter - Interim Control Ordinance (ICO) / Suspending Ongoing Construction / Hillside / Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (Council File: 20-1170) – OPPOSITION LETTER

Dear Chair Harris-Dawson,

The Los Angeles/Ventura Chapter of the Building Industry Association of Southern California, Inc. (BIA-LAV), is a non-profit trade association focused on building housing for all. On behalf of our membership, we would like to express our concerns and opposition to the Interim Control Ordinance (ICO)/ Suspending Ongoing Construction/ Hillside/ Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The City of Los Angeles has been facing a historic housing crisis, made worse by the crippling pandemic induced recession. The combination of these two emergencies has negatively impacted the economy and the jobs of Los Angeles residents. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that housing be built and planned for within existing fire safety guidelines, and that safe jobs be protected.

BIA-LAV and its members are deeply committed to fire safety and mitigation throughout the entirety of the homebuilding process. In fact, new construction has led the way in the adoption of natural resource resiliency and fire safety. California and Los Angeles County have some of the highest fire mitigation standards in the Country. California's Building Standards Code (Title 24, Parts 1-12) has been updated every 18 months with new editions of the codes published every three years to dictate fire safety compliance. In 2008, homebuilding fire safety standards were further enhanced when the California Code of Regulations (CCR) was updated to include Title 14, Natural Resources Department of Forestry & Fire Protection, Chapter 7: Fire Protection, Article 2: Emergency Access and Egress. During that same time, the first full iteration of the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fire safety standards also took effect. When reviewing the State building code, experts agree that California is on the forefront of fire safety.



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Fire safety and mitigation regulations aren't limited to State implementation. The City of Los Angeles has a Fire Prevention Bureau tasked with the investigation of the cause, origin, and circumstances of fires. The Bureau also manages the elimination of fire and life safety hazards in buildings. The City's Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) works with the City of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) to ensure compliance and efficiencies with regulations and procedures, such as retrofitting, fireproofing, sprinkler installation, fire alarm, and fire life safety standards. Additionally, the City has a robust fire inspection management system that enforces standards for new construction. These fire safety compliance measures are codified within the City's municipal code and are regularly updated to address new risks and changes to State law.

Furthermore, we know that the homebuilding processes and the homes built under the State's strict building codes help to mitigate fire danger. Even in the worst fires, like the Camp Fire in the City of Paradise, new homes and new construction are at a much lower risk and better protected, due to compliance with State level regulations. According to a [Sacramento Bee](#) investigative report, fewer than three percent of the homes in the path of the Camp Fire were built after 2008. This means that homes built under the State's current WUI and Title 14 fire regulations had a significantly better chance of survival. Today, new housing construction is better equipped for California's wildfire threat because of the success of our State Building Codes when combined with defensible space maintenance.

We understand that wildfires are dangerous, and the homebuilding and construction industries take fire safety responsibilities seriously. As previously described, all new, production-housing development is continually inspected for compliance throughout the land prep/development and construction processes. Because of this, we are deeply concerned that this Motion's solution to fire safety by eliminating construction does not directly address the problem it seeks to remedy. We ask that the relevant City Departments weigh-in on the actions included in this Motion to advise on what are the causes of hillside and wildfires and how would those fires be better mitigated. We're concerned that this Motion fails to address on going City enforcement and monitoring of defensible space. Additionally, we would appreciate more information and data on the language of the Motion stating that, "one of the causes of hillside fires is the construction of ongoing projects." We are unaware of an instance that a hillside fire was caused by construction. The Motion also states apprehension related to egress and accessibility. This issue, as previously mentioned, has been addressed through State standards found in Title 14, Article 2: Emergency Access and Egress. New construction is compliant in addressing these issues by providing unobstructed traffic circulation during a wildfire emergency, and safe access for emergency wildfire equipment and civilian evacuation, concurrently.

Lastly, we want to bring attention to the economic health of the City. Over the last six months dozens of industries have been shut down due to the pandemic. Many service, tourism, entertainment, and even government employees have been furloughed or laid off. Construction has been a beacon of hope for many who are working in this rightfully deemed essential industry. Thousands of



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construction jobs stand to be lost if this Motion is adopted. Just this week, the [Los Angeles Times](#) published an article predicting that the State's economic recovery may take over two years to realize. The only industry mentioned to be on track to pre-pandemic production is construction. If this Motion stops one of the only viable industries during this pandemic the impacts of these lost wages will have a crushing effect on families, businesses and people who need homes.

For the many reasons outlined in this letter, we urge you, your colleagues and City staff to review our concerns, and seek the counsel of relevant City departments to identify alternative solutions to meet the goals sought through this Motion. BIA-LAV looks forward to working with the Council and City staff on this item. Should you have any questions, please contact BIA-LAV Vice President, Diana Coronado, at dcoronado@bialav.org.

Sincerely,

Diana Victoria Coronado
Vice President
BIA-Los Angeles/Ventura

CC:

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The Honorable Nury Martinez, Council President
The Honorable Gil Cedillo, Councilmember
The Honorable Paul Krekorian, Councilmember
The Honorable Bob Blumenfield, Councilmember
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Holly L. Wolcott, Los Angeles City Clerk
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