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KATHLEEN KRAUSE
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, California 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay 800-735-2929

March 25, 2025

The Honorable Juan Carrillo
Chair, Assembly Committee on Local Government
1020 N Street, Room 157
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 1156 (Wicks), Solar-use easements and suspension of Williamson Act contracts – OPPOSE

Dear Assembly Member Carrillo,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong opposition to AB 1156 (Wicks), which circumvents the cancellation requirements of Williamson Act contracts and undermines the contractual authority of counties.

Kern County has 1,478,807 acres under Williamson Act contracts (10 years) and 1,419,024 acres under Farmland Security Zone contracts (20 years). While we lead the state in acreage under these conservation programs, we also lead in permitting and developing renewable energy projects, with over 60,000 acres dedicated to solar alone.

AB 1156 seeks to streamline the process for renewable energy companies by circumventing the cancellation requirements of Williamson Act contracts and undermines the contractual authority of counties. It transfers decision-making power over land use from counties to the California Energy Commission (CEC) and the Department of Conservation—two state agencies that, while overseeing aspects of the Williamson Act and renewable energy projects, are not parties to the contracts between counties and landowners.

This legislation would allow landowners—who, in reality, are often solar companies leasing the land—to negotiate directly with the Department of Conservation regarding contract terms, without county oversight or agreement. Unlike zoning regulations, Williamson Act contracts are voluntary agreements between counties and landowners, exchanging property tax reductions for committed agricultural use. The Board of Supervisors, not the State, has sole authority over these contracts. Notably, since 2009, when the State ceased subvention payments, the Department of Conservation no longer audits the program or reviews contract cancellations.

The proposed changes in AB 1156 represent a veiled attempt by the solar industry to override county authority and avoid the formal cancellation process. By granting the CEC and the Department of Conservation jurisdiction over Williamson Act contracts for solar and energy storage projects, this bill creates a mechanism to circumvent the contractual rights of counties, particularly in the context of projects reviewed under AB 205's Opt-in Certification Program—which currently cannot modify or cancel Williamson Act or Farmland Security Zone contracts. Furthermore, it perpetuates a troubling

trend in the renewable energy industry of leveraging agricultural tax incentives while failing to contribute full property tax revenues to counties.

Since 1965, counties have faithfully implemented the Williamson Act, balancing agricultural preservation with evolving technologies. There are alternative pathways to appropriately site commercial-scale solar and energy storage projects without undermining county authority or contract integrity.

For these reasons, Kern County opposes AB 1156 unless amended to respect the contractual relationship between the Kern County Board of Supervisors and landowners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Leticia Perez', with a stylized, cursive script.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Committee on Local Government
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange