

State of California

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 31, 2024

To: President Alice Reynolds
Commissioner Matthew Baker
Commissioner John Reynolds

From: Commissioner Karen Douglas and Commissioner Darcie L. Houck

Subject: New Appointment to the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG) – Senait Forthal

Recommended Appointment

Based on the recently vacated seat on the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG), we recommend the appointment of Senait Forthal.

Background

Senate Bill 350 (de León, Chapter 547, Statutes of 2015), as codified in Public Utilities Code section 400(g), requires the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) to establish an Advisory Group consisting of representatives from disadvantaged communities (Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group or DACAG). The purpose of the DACAG is to review and provide advice on proposed clean energy and pollution reduction programs and determine whether those proposed programs will be effective and useful in environmental and social justice communities. The DACAG is subject to a Charter approved by the CPUC and CEC.

The DACAG is comprised of 11 members who serve two-year staggered terms. Five members shall serve in two-year terms running from April 1 to March 31 of even years. Five members, plus the Governor’s tribal representative, serve two-year terms running from April 1 to March 31 of odd years. A member may be reappointed, but no member may serve for more than three consecutive full terms. Per Section 3.4 of the Charter, for a “member [who] is unable to serve the full two years of his or her term, a replacement will be selected to fill the vacancy and complete the term.” One member resigned on May 21, 2024. Therefore, there is one DACAG seat available for appointment.

Discussion

On January 10, 2024, the Commissions issued a solicitation for application for membership on the DACAG to fill anticipated vacancies. The application deadline was January 31, 2024. Numerous candidates representing disadvantaged communities statewide submitted applications, including Senait Forthal. CPUC and CEC staff interviewed many candidates and jointly recommended new appointments and reappointments for consideration. At the Commission's May 9, 2024 voting meeting, the Commission approved new appointments and reappointments to the DACAG. Although Senait Forthal was not among these appointments, during the screening and interview process she was identified as first in line to be recommended for an appointment should another vacancy arise in the near term.

On May 21, 2024 DACAG member Sahara Huazano resigned from the DACAG, creating a new vacancy. We recommend Senait Forthal as the candidate to fill this vacancy.

The following is a brief summary of Ms. Forthal's qualifications:

Senait Forthal is the founder and Executive Director of OC Goes Solar (OCGS), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission to make solar energy and other clean technologies accessible and affordable for all residents throughout Orange County, especially in underserved communities. She is a trained clean energy and sustainability professional with over seven years of consulting experience both in solar energy and building energy efficiency in the commercial and industrial sectors before establishing OCGS. Ms. Forthal advocates for zero-emission solutions in all facets of life.

With significant experience on social and climate justice issues, Ms. Forthal actively serves her community in multiple capacities. She serves a key role as sustainability Commissioner for the City of Irvine contributing to local initiatives. Additionally, she lends her expertise as a member of the Community Advisory Council for the recently established Orange County Power Authority and serves as vice chair on the California Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing Job Training Task Force (CALSOMAH's JTO), spearheading efforts to integrate solar solutions and job trainings into affordable housing projects. Ms. Forthal earned her degree in Urban & Regional Planning with a minor in Environmental Studies from UC Irvine, solidifying her commitment to sustainable development.

The CEC is expected to recommend approval of Ms. Forthal at its business meeting on June 12, 2024. The new appointment to the DACAG will be confirmed once the CPUC and CEC both vote to approve. Ms. Forthal will complete the term of the resigning member, effective immediately, through March 31, 2025.

Conclusion

Senait Forthal is highly qualified and will make a valuable addition to the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group in advising the CPUC and CEC, and we recommend her appointment.