City of Whittier

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Joe Vinatieri
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City Manager

December 4, 2018

Submitted via email:
public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov

Michael Picker, President
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: Proceeding R. 18-10-007 Wildfire Mitigation Plans

Dear President Picker:

As Mayor of the City of Whittier, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on proceeding R. 18-10-007 regarding investor-owned utilities (IOUs) Wildfire Mitigation Plans. Our community relies on Southern California Edison to safely provide the energy we need for basic public services. We appreciate the leadership of the California Public Utilities Commission in addressing the increasingly devastating and destructive wildfires California has faced in recent years.

As a city of nearly 87,000 residents directly adjacent to a 3,870 acre wildlife preserve in the Whittier Hills, we are inherently aware of the need for wildfire and disaster preparedness and response. With the trends of increasing wildfire severity, we absolutely agree that it is necessary to strengthen safety policies and other policies to protect against these disasters. We respectfully request that IOUs coordinate with local agencies in their service territory when developing wildfire mitigation plans.

New utility wildfire mitigation plans will have numerous direct effects on local governments, including receipt of notifications, recloser and de-energizing protocols, plans for restoring service, and vegetation management. Due to our urban-wildland interface, we are immediately impacted by changes in vegetation management procedures and would appreciate the opportunity to work with utilities on changes to such policies. We appreciate the opportunity to work with the IOU on vegetation management procedures that combine both the safety of our residents and businesses with our ongoing goals of habitat preservation and restoration in the Whittier Hills.

Moreover, protocols for de-energizing utility lines have important effects on residents, businesses, and city operations. In response to power outages, Whittier must change traffic signals (a labor-intensive transition that requires city staff time), deploy generators for water pump stations to maintain water pressure for both fire-fighting and potable uses, and call in additional staff for utility and public safety measures. Furthermore, as a City that is home to two hospitals with a combined 726 patient beds and more than a dozen skilled nursing facilities, we would very much appreciate the opportunity to balance wildlife safety with the critical need for utilities to provide notice to customers of any impending disruptions to electrical service.

For these reasons, we request the Commission consider our request that utilities coordinate with local governments. Thank you for considering our comments. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (562) 567-9301.

Sincerely,

Joe Vinatieri
Mayor

c: Whittier City Council
Erin Evans-Fudem, League of California Cities, Legislative Representative