



COMMUNITIES FOR A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

*Building Community Power to Achieve Environmental Justice,
Clean Energy and Healthy Communities*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Oakland for the Living” Community Files Lawsuit Challenging the City of Oakland’s Environmental Injustice

Oakland, CA – Oakland residents have been outraged about the proposed mega-crematorium proposed in East Oakland. These residents include local businesses and hundreds of members of the public who have attended and testified at several City Council and Planning Commission meetings, sent letters, signed petitions, and protested the City of Oakland’s permitting of Stewart Enterprises’ proposed crematorium facility in East Oakland. This proposal would site the largest crematorium on the West Coast, emitting pollutants such as arsenic, hexavalent chromium, lead and mercury onto a community of color.

“Stewart Enterprise have been tone deaf to seniors, families and other residents in the community who have expressed legitimate health and safety concerns about this project,” said Reverend Buford, Minister of Prophetic Justice at Allen Temple Baptist Church. “As a result of not considering these concerns, I am calling upon all clergy to boycott them because we are deeply concerned with health and well being of the living.”

The Alameda County Public Health Department identifies that this community already bears a disproportionate share of environmental harms, including greatly elevated risks of cancer, asthma, heart attacks and other serious health problems caused by higher exposures to toxic air contaminants and other pollutants. Stewart Enterprises’ proposed operation will substantially increase risks of serious health problems in this community - and the City of Oakland permitted this facility without any environmental review.

We believe that the City of Oakland Planning Staff is discriminating against a community it believes does not have a voice, and arbitrarily classified Stewart’s mega-project as a, “general manufacturing facility.” As a result, staff did not require any public notice or process to ensure the proper environmental review of this project. This improper classification would not happen in other parts of the city.

However, since the inception of Oakland's zoning laws, Planning Staff has always required public notice and a Conditional Use Permitting process to minimize any environmental harm from newly proposed crematoriums projects. City Planning Staff clearly abused their discretion by suddenly departing from that required procedure, especially with a project of this magnitude.

Stewart Enterprises is now using legal arguments to exploit the City's error, and are trying to bypass the proper and required environmental review. This company is exploiting the City's area because Emeryville and Richmond said no to this similar project. Stewart Enterprises is trying to capitalize on the City's mistake and trying to dump more toxic pollution in a community of color. At this point, the community has no other recourse but to file today's lawsuit against the City and Stewart Enterprises.

"We're in the midst of more toxic pollution here because we're a disenfranchised community. Our families' health is not being taken seriously and we don't want the dead to kill the living," said Maxine Oliver-Benson, CBE member and East Oakland resident.

"Queremos que respeten y hagan valer nuestros derechos." ("We want our rights to be valued and respected.") said Lety V. Garcia, an East Oakland community advocate.

For more information, visit www.cbecal.org/organizing/northern-california/oakland/#crematorium