

ORAL ARGUMENT NOT YET SCHEDULED

No. 20-1145

Consolidated with Nos. 20-1167, 20-1168, 20-1169, 20-1173,
20-1174, 20-1176, 20-1177, and 20-1230

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CIRCUIT

COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, et al.,
Petitioners,

v.

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION, et al.,
Respondents.

**STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PETITIONERS'
OPPOSITION TO RESPONDENTS' MOTION FOR ABEYANCE**

XAVIER BECERRA
Attorney General of California
ROBERT W. BYRNE
Senior Assistant Attorney General
DAVID A. ZONANA
Acting Senior Assistant Attorney General
GARY E. TAVETIAN
Supervising Deputy Attorney General

JESSICA BARCLAY-STROBEL
JULIA K. FORGIE
MEREDITH HANKINS
MICAELA M. HARMS
JENNIFER KALNINS TEMPLE
CAROLYN NELSON ROWAN
ROBERT D. SWANSON
JONATHAN A. WIENER
DAVID ZAFT
M. ELAINE MECKENSTOCK
Deputy Attorneys General
1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612-0550
Telephone: (510) 879-0299
Elaine.Meckenstock@doj.ca.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner State of California, by and through its Governor Gavin Newsom,
Attorney General Xavier Becerra, and the California Air Resources Board*

Additional counsel listed in signature block

INTRODUCTION

State and Local Government Petitioners welcome Executive Order 13990, which directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to review and potentially revise the standards challenged in these consolidated cases. However, the harms resulting from these unlawfully lax standards grow larger and larger with each passing model year of vehicle sales. The sheer magnitude of these accumulating harms, which include greenhouse gas emission increases greater than the *total* emissions of many States, warrants continued judicial oversight to ensure an opportunity for resolution if Respondents' review is delayed or leaves some of these harmful standards in place. State and Local Government Petitioners therefore oppose Respondents' request for an indefinite abeyance.

State and Local Government Petitioners would not, however, oppose a six-month extension to the existing briefing schedule. Under that approach, Respondents' brief would not be due until October 15, 2021, two and a half months after Respondents anticipate completing their review. *See* ECF Doc. No. 1866329 ("Respondents' Mot.") at 5 (review to be complete by the end of July, pursuant to the Executive Order). Respondents would not need to file a brief while they are reviewing the challenged standards, thereby safeguarding the important interests in conserving Respondents' and judicial resources. And,

by keeping a briefing schedule in place, this approach would facilitate timely judicial action, if such action is necessary, thereby protecting State and Local Government Petitioners' and the public's interests in avoiding increased pollution and oil consumption. All parties would remain free to bring future motions regarding alternative procedural paths forward (including indefinite abeyance) after Respondents complete their review and issue a notice of proposed rulemaking (if they do so). Consideration of any such motions would thus be informed by critical factual information that is unavailable now, including the extent to which any proposed rulemaking addresses all the standards and harms at issue in this litigation.

ARGUMENT

I. INDEFINITE ABEYANCE IS NOT APPROPRIATE IN THIS MATTER

State and Local Government Petitioners recognize that abeyance is common where a change in presidential Administrations prompts reconsideration of administrative positions. But this is not a typical case.

First, even small delays matter here because of the magnitude of the harms involved. The national greenhouse gas emission and fuel-economy standards at issue here address vehicles, which are the largest sources of greenhouse gas pollution and the largest consumers of oil in the nation. The challenged standards substantially weakened prior law for six model years of light-duty

vehicles, resulting, among other things, in dramatically increased emissions of harmful pollutants. These harms have already begun, and they grow larger with each vehicle model year as the gap widens between the pre-existing standards (which increased in stringency by 5% each model year) and the current standards (which increase by only 1.5% each model year). *See* 85 Fed. Reg. 24,174, 24,175, 25,106 (April 30, 2020). And the vehicles sold under the current, weaker standards will continue to emit these higher levels of pollution as long as they remain in use—for periods that run years, and often decades, into the future.

Executive Order 13990, titled “Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,” was adopted on the first day of the new Administration in recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis. State and Local Government Petitioners fully share that sense of urgency and wholeheartedly welcome the Administration’s plans to review the current, unlawfully weak standards. But these standards will remain in place unless and until they are stayed or vacated by this Court or are replaced administratively through final agency actions. Despite State and Local Government Petitioners’ efforts to advance this litigation more quickly, one or more model years of vehicles will likely be sold under the lax current

standards.¹ State and Local Government Petitioners therefore oppose any motion that would unnecessarily increase the potential for further delay, and they do so for the same reason they have consistently sought to resolve this case efficiently: to limit the number of model years during which more polluting vehicle fleets can be sold. Indefinite abeyance is inappropriate in the face of long-term impacts that increase in severity with each passing model year.

Second, because no rulemaking proposal has issued, it is unknown which model years might be covered by any future administrative action, let alone how stringent future standards might be. As a result, it is also unknown whether a future rulemaking can adequately and timely resolve Petitioners' challenges concerning all of the model-year standards at stake here. If it does not, and judicial review remains necessary, that review should occur without further delay. *See Teledesic LLC v. FCC*, 275 F.3d 75, 82-83 (D.C. Cir. 2001) (resolving "remaining challenges" to agency action after reconsideration where Court denied abeyance during that reconsideration). State and Local

¹ Under the prior Administration, Respondents filed incomplete certified indices of their administrative records, and the efforts to identify and address the omissions delayed further progress in the case by months. *See* ECF Doc. No. 1862650 at 7-8. Respondents also requested, and the Court granted, a more extended briefing schedule than the one Petitioners sought, which was designed to allow for oral argument during this Term. ECF Doc. Nos. 1861390 at 18; 1860054 at 11867064 at 3.

Government Petitioners should not bear the burdens and attendant delays of moving to bring this matter out of abeyance, obtaining a new briefing schedule, and then finally obtaining judicial relief, should that be necessary.

The examples cited in Respondents' motion do not support a contrary conclusion. *See* Respondents' Mot. at 8-9. None of the cited cases involved multiple national standards that cause more severe harms with each passing model year where any future rulemaking may not encompass all the model-year standards at issue.² Thus, none of Respondents' cases presents circumstances analogous to those of this case: where the Agencies' reconsideration may not moot the issues presented by the litigation, even if it results in some new standards for some model years. *Cf. Am. Petroleum Inst. v. EPA*, 683 F.3d 382, 388 (D.C. Cir. 2012) (granting abeyance where "an already published proposed rule, if enacted, would dispense with the need for" judicial review). Here, the Agencies have not yet initiated new rulemakings or informed Petitioners or the public of the scope of standards they may seek to change. *See Util. Solid Waste Activities Grp. v. EPA*, 901 F.3d 414, 426 (D.C. Cir. 2018) (rejecting agency's

² *Union of Concerned Scientists v. NHTSA*, D.C. Cir. No. 19-1230, is also distinguishable because there the Agencies are on a tighter schedule to complete their review (by the end of April), because any resulting administrative proceedings are unlikely to involve highly technical and time-consuming rulemakings of the kind at issue here, and because that case is fully briefed, which means it can proceed to argument without further delay should it be appropriate to lift the abeyance in the future.

request for abeyance to “consider[] potential regulatory changes” where the scope of agency reconsideration might not encompass the challenged rules).

II. A SIX-MONTH EXTENSION TO THE BRIEFING SCHEDULE WOULD ADEQUATELY SAFEGUARD RESPONDENTS’ INTERESTS

State and Local Government Petitioners recognize Respondents’ understandable concerns about continuing with briefing while they are reviewing the challenged standards. But those concerns can be addressed by a six-month extension to the current briefing schedule.

A six-month extension would “afford [the Agencies] the opportunity to respond to the Executive Order by reviewing the Rule in accordance with the new policies set forth in the Order,” Respondents’ Mot. at 5; “ensure due respect for the prerogative of the executive branch to reconsider the policy decisions of a prior Administration,” *id.* at 5-6; and “avoid [any risk of] filing briefs and holding oral argument in the midst of the new Administration’s review,” *id.* at 7. There would likewise be no need for the Court to engage in “unnecessary adjudication” while Respondents conduct their review. *See id.* at 5. Respondents nonetheless express concern that a six-month extension “could pose significant complications” if Respondents had to brief this case in the middle of a new rulemaking. *Id.* at 8 n.2. But, if a new rulemaking is underway by July 31, 2021, Respondents would have adequate time to seek a further

extension or an indefinite abeyance for all, or appropriate parts, of this litigation before any brief would be due.

Indeed, if a rulemaking proposal issues by the end of July, *all parties* would have sufficient time to assess that proposal and its relationship to this litigation, and seek appropriate relief from the Court, before any briefs would be due. For example, all parties would know which model years the Agencies have included in their rulemaking proposal and would also know how stringent the Agencies propose to make those revised standards. That information is highly relevant to State and Local Government Petitioners' assessment of whether they can and should pursue additional relief in this litigation, such as a stay or vacatur of the standards applicable to any model years not covered (or insufficiently covered) by the proposal. And in the event a proposal has not issued by the end of July, that information would also be highly relevant to whether and how this case should proceed to resolution. A continuance of the briefing schedule would also have the advantage over an abeyance—including one with motions to govern due in six months—of leaving a briefing schedule in place.

In sum, a six-month extension would address Respondents' concerns and minimize the risk of further delays, without transforming *Respondents'* burden to establish that this Court should forgo its obligation to adjudicate these cases into *Petitioners'* burden to lift abeyance.

CONCLUSION

State and Local Government Petitioners respectfully request that the Court deny Respondents' motion for indefinite abeyance but would not oppose a six-month extension of the current briefing schedule.

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Respectfully submitted,

XAVIER BECERRA

Attorney General of California

ROBERT W. BYRNE

Senior Assistant Attorney General

DAVID A. ZONANA

Acting Senior Assistant Attorney General

GARY E. TAVETIAN

Supervising Deputy Attorney General

/s/ M. Elaine Meckenstock

M. ELAINE MECKENSTOCK

Deputy Attorney General

Attorneys for Petitioner State of California, by and

through its Governor Gavin Newsom, Attorney

General Xavier Becerra, and California Air

Resources Board

FOR THE STATE OF COLORADO

PHIL WEISER
Colorado Attorney General

/s/ Eric R. Olson

ERIC R. OLSON
Solicitor General
Office of the Attorney General
1300 Broadway, 10th Floor
Denver, CO 80203
Telephone: (720) 508-6548
eric.olson@coag.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Colorado

FOR THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

WILLIAM TONG
Attorney General of Connecticut
MATTHEW I. LEVINE
Deputy Associate Attorney General

/s/ Scott N. Koschwitz

SCOTT N. KOSCHWITZ
Assistant Attorney General
165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106
Telephone: (860) 808-5250
Fax: (860) 808-5386
Scott.Koschwitz@ct.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Connecticut

FOR THE STATE OF DELAWARE

KATHLEEN JENNINGS
Attorney General of the State of
Delaware

/s/ Kayli H. Spialter

KAYLI H. SPIALTER
CHRISTIAN WRIGHT
Deputy Attorneys General
Delaware Department of Justice
820 N. French Street, 6th Floor
Wilmington, DE 19801
Telephone: (302) 395-2604
Kayli.Spialter@delaware.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Delaware

FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

KARL A. RACINE
Attorney General for the District of
Columbia

/s/ Loren L. AliKhan

LOREN L. ALIKHAN
Solicitor General
Office of the Attorney General for the
District of Columbia
400 6th Street, NW, Suite 8100
Washington, D.C. 20001
Telephone: (202) 727-6287
Fax: (202) 730-1864
Loren.AliKhan@dc.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner District of Columbia

FOR THE STATE OF HAWAII

CLARE E. CONNORS
Attorney General

/s/ Diane K. Taira*

DIANE K. TAIRA
KIMBERLY T. GUIDRY
Deputy Attorneys General
State of Hawaii Office of the Attorney
General
425 Queen Street
Honolulu, HI 96813
Telephone: (808) 587-3050
Diane.K.Taira@Hawaii.gov

**Application for admission pending*

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Hawaii

FOR THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
Attorney General of Illinois
MATTHEW J. DUNN
Chief, Environmental Enforcement/
Asbestos Litigation Division
JASON E. JAMES
Assistant Attorney General

/s/ Daniel I. Rottenberg

DANIEL I. ROTTENBERG
Assistant Attorney General
69 W. Washington St., 18th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602
Telephone: (312) 814-3816
DRottenberg@atg.state.il.us

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Illinois

FOR THE STATE OF MAINE

AARON M. FREY
Attorney General of Maine

/s/ Laura E. Jensen

LAURA E. JENSEN
Assistant Attorney General
6 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Telephone: (207) 626-8868
Fax: (207) 626-8812
Laura.Jensen@maine.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Maine

FOR THE STATE OF MARYLAND

BRIAN E. FROSH
Attorney General of Maryland

/s/ Cynthia M. Weisz

CYNTHIA M. WEISZ
Assistant Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
Maryland Department of the
Environment
1800 Washington Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21230
Telephone: (410) 537-3014
cynthia.weisz2@maryland.gov

JOHN B. HOWARD, JR.
JOSHUA M. SEGAL
STEVEN J. GOLDSTEIN
Special Assistant Attorneys General
Office of the Attorney General
200 St. Paul Place
Baltimore, MD 21202
Telephone: (410) 576-6300
jbhoward@oag.state.md.us
jsegal@oag.state.md.us
sgoldstein@oag.state.md.us

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Maryland

FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF
MASSACHUSETTS

MAURA HEALEY
Attorney General
CHRISTOPHE COURCHESNE
Assistant Attorney General and
Deputy Chief
CAROL IANCU
Assistant Attorney General
MEGAN M. HERZOG
DAVID S. FRANKEL
Special Assistant Attorneys General

/s/ Matthew Ireland
MATTHEW IRELAND
Assistant Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
Environmental Protection Division
One Ashburton Place, 18th Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: (617) 727-2200
matthew.ireland@mass.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner Commonwealth of
Massachusetts*

FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF
MICHIGAN

DANA NESSEL
Attorney General of Michigan
/s/ Neil D. Gordon
NEIL D. GORDON
GILLIAN E. WENER
Assistant Attorneys General
Michigan Department of Attorney
General
Environment, Natural Resources
and Agriculture Division
P.O. Box 30755
Lansing, MI 48909
Telephone: (517) 335-7664
gordonn1@michigan.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner People of the State of
Michigan*

FOR THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

KEITH ELLISON
Attorney General of Minnesota

/s/ Peter N. Surdo

PETER N. SURDO
Special Assistant Attorney General
445 Minnesota Street, Suite 900
St. Paul, MN, 55101
Telephone: (651) 757-1061
Peter.Surdo@ag.state.mn.us

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Minnesota

FOR THE STATE OF NEVADA

AARON D. FORD
Attorney General of Nevada

/s/ Heidi Parry Stern

HEIDI PARRY STERN
Solicitor General
DANIEL P. NUBEL
Deputy Attorney General
Office of the Nevada Attorney General
100 N. Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701
HStern@ag.nv.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Nevada

FOR THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

GURBIR S. GREWAL
Attorney General of New Jersey

/s/ Lisa Morelli

LISA MORELLI
Deputy Attorney General
25 Market St., PO Box 093
Trenton, NJ 08625-0093
Telephone: (609) 376-2745
Fax: (609) 341-5031
lisa.morelli@law.njoag.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of New Jersey

FOR THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO

HECTOR BALDERAS
Attorney General of New Mexico

/s/ William Grantham

WILLIAM GRANTHAM
Assistant Attorney General
State of New Mexico Office of the
Attorney General
Consumer & Environmental Protection
Division
201 Third Street NW, Suite 300
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Telephone: (505) 717-3520
wgrantham@nmag.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of New Mexico

FOR THE STATE OF NEW YORK

LETTITIA JAMES

Attorney General of New York

STEVEN C. WU

Deputy Solicitor General

YUEH-RU CHU

Chief, Affirmative Litigation Section

Environmental Protection Bureau

AUSTIN THOMPSON

Assistant Attorney General

/s/ Gavin G. McCabe

GAVIN G. MCCABE

Assistant Attorney General

28 Liberty Street, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10005

Telephone: (212) 416-8469

gavin.mccabe@ag.ny.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of New York

FOR THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

JOSHUA H. STEIN

Attorney General

DANIEL S. HIRSCHMAN

Senior Deputy Attorney General

FRANCISCO BENZONI

Special Deputy Attorney General

/s/ Asher P. Spiller

ASHER P. SPILLER

TAYLOR CRABTREE

Assistant Attorneys General

North Carolina Department of Justice

P.O. Box 629

Raleigh, NC 27602

Telephone: (919) 716-6400

Attorneys for Petitioner State of North Carolina

FOR THE STATE OF OREGON

ELLEN F. ROSENBLUM
Attorney General of Oregon

/s/ Paul Garrahan

PAUL GARRAHAN
Attorney-in-Charge
STEVE NOVICK
Special Assistant Attorney General
Natural Resources Section
Oregon Department of Justice
1162 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-4096
Telephone: (503) 947-4593
Paul.Garrahan@doj.state.or.us
Steve.Novick@doj.state.or.us

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Oregon

FOR THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

PETER F. NERONHA
Attorney General of Rhode Island

/s/ Gregory S. Schultz

GREGORY S. SCHULTZ
Special Assistant Attorney General
Office of Attorney General
150 South Main Street
Providence, RI 02903
Telephone: (401) 274-4400
gschultz@riag.ri.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Rhode Island

FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF
PENNSYLVANIA

JOSH SHAPIRO
Attorney General of Pennsylvania
MICHAEL J. FISCHER
Chief Deputy Attorney General
JACOB B. BOYER
Deputy Attorney General

/s/ Ann R. Johnston

ANN R. JOHNSTON
Senior Deputy Attorney General
Office of Attorney General
1600 Arch St. Suite 300
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Telephone: (215) 560-2171
ajohnston@attorneygeneral.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania*

FOR THE STATE OF VERMONT

THOMAS J. DONOVAN, JR.
Attorney General

/s/ Nicholas F. Persampieri

NICHOLAS F. PERSAMPIERI
Assistant Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609
Telephone: (802) 828-3171
nick.persampieri@vermont.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Vermont

FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

MARK R. HERRING

Attorney General

PAUL KUGELMAN, JR.

Senior Assistant Attorney General
Chief, Environmental Section/s/ Caitlin C. G. O'Dwyer

CAITLIN C. G. O'DWYER

Assistant Attorney General

Office of the Attorney General

Commonwealth of Virginia

202 North 9th Street

Richmond, VA 23219

Telephone: (804) 786-1780

godwyer@oag.state.va.us

*Attorneys for Petitioner Commonwealth of
Virginia*

FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

ROBERT W. FERGUSON

Attorney General

/s/ Emily C. Nelson

EMILY C. NELSON

Assistant Attorney General

Office of the Attorney General

P.O. Box 40117

Olympia, WA 98504

Telephone: (360) 586-4607

emily.nelson@atg.wa.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Washington

FOR THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

JOSHUA L. KAUL
Attorney General of Wisconsin

/s/ Jennifer L. Vandermeuse

JENNIFER L. VANDERMEUSE
GABE JOHNSON-KARP
Assistant Attorneys General
Wisconsin Department of Justice
Post Office Box 7857
Madison, WI 53702-7857
Telephone: (608) 266-7741 (JLV)
(608) 267-8904 (GJK)
Fax: (608) 267-2223
vandermeusejl@doj.state.wi.us
johnsonkarp@doj.state.wi.us

Attorneys for Petitioner State of Wisconsin

FOR THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

MICHAEL N. FEUER
Los Angeles City Attorney
MICHAEL J. BOSTROM
Assistant City Attorney

/s/ Michael J. Bostrom

MICHAEL J. BOSTROM
Assistant City Attorney
200 N. Spring Street, 14th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Telephone: (213) 978-1867
Fax: (213) 978-2286
Michael.Bostrom@lacity.org

Attorneys for Petitioner City of Los Angeles

FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

JAMES E. JOHNSON
New York City Corporation Counsel
CHRISTOPHER G. KING
ALICE R. BAKER
Senior Counsel
SHIVA PRAKASH
Assistant Corporation Counsel

/s/ Christopher G. King

CHRISTOPHER G. KING
Senior Counsel
New York City Law Department
100 Church Street
New York, New York
Telephone: (212) 356-2074
Fax: (212) 356-2084
cking@law.nyc.gov

Attorneys for Petitioner City of New York

FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER

KRISTIN M. BRONSON
City Attorney
EDWARD J. GORMAN
LINDSAY S. CARDER
Assistant City Attorneys

/s/ Edward J. Gorman

EDWARD J. GORMAN
Assistant City Attorney
Denver City Attorney's Office
201 W. Colfax Avenue, Dept. 1207
Denver, Colorado 80202
Telephone: (720) 913-3275
Edward.Gorman@denvergov.org

*Attorneys for Petitioner City and County of
Denver*

FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN
FRANCISCO

DENNIS J. HERRERA
City Attorney
ROBB W. KAPLA
Deputy City Attorney

/s/ Robb W. Kapla

ROBB W. KAPLA
Deputy City Attorney
City Hall, Room 234
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, California 94102-4602
Telephone: (415) 554-4746
Fax: (415) 554-4715
Robb.Kapla@sfcityatty.org

*Attorneys for Petitioner City and County of San
Francisco*

FOR THE BAY AREA AIR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

/s/ Brian C. Bungler

BRIAN C. BUNGER, District Counsel
RANDI LEIGH WALLACH
Bay Area Air Quality Mgmt. District
375 Beale Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: (415) 749-4920
Fax: (415) 749-5103
BBunger@baaqmd.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner Bay Area Air Quality
Management District*

FOR THE SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN
AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

/s/ Kathrine Pittard

KATHRINE PITTARD, District
Counsel

Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality
Mgmt. District

777 12th Street

Sacramento, CA 95819

Telephone: (916) 874-4907

Fax: (916) 874-4899

KPittard@airquality.org

*Attorney for Petitioner Sacramento Metropolitan
Air Quality Management District*

FOR THE SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

BARBARA BAIRD

Chief Deputy Counsel

/s/ Brian Tomasovic

BRIAN TOMASOVIC

KATHRYN ROBERTS

South Coast Air Quality Mgmt. District

21865 Copley Dr., Diamond Bar, CA
91765

Telephone: (909) 396-3400

Fax: (909) 396-2961

BTomasovic@aqmd.gov

*Attorneys for Petitioner South Coast Air Quality
Management District*

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

I hereby certify that the foregoing opposition complies with the type-volume limitations of the applicable rules. According to Microsoft Word, the non-exempt portions of the opposition contain 1,631 words. I further certify that this brief complies with the typeface requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(5) and the type-style requirements of Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(a)(6) because this document has been prepared in a proportionally spaced, 14-point typeface (Garamond).

/s/ M. Elaine Meckenstock

M. ELAINE MECKENSTOCK

Deputy Attorney General

1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor

Oakland, CA 94612

Telephone: (510) 879-0299

Fax: (510) 622-2270

Elaine.Meckenstock@doj.ca.gov

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on March 1, 2021, I electronically filed the foregoing opposition with the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit via the CM/ECF system. All parties that are represented by counsel registered as CM/ECF users will be served by that system. I further certify that service will be accomplished via email for the following participant:

Diane K. Taira
State of Hawaii
Dept. of the Attorney General
425 Queen Street
Honolulu, HI 96813
Diane.K.Taira@hawaii.gov

/s/ M. Elaine Meckenstock
M. ELAINE MECKENSTOCK
Deputy Attorney General
1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
Telephone: (510) 879-0299
Fax: (510) 622-2270
Elaine.Meckenstock@doj.ca.gov