



**CALIFORNIA
HOSPITAL
ASSOCIATION**

*Providing Leadership in
Health Policy and Advocacy*

January 28, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby L. Rush
Chairman
Energy Subcommittee
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Fred Upton
Ranking Member
Energy Subcommittee
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko
Chairman
Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus
Ranking Member
Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Pallone, Rush and Tonko and Ranking Members Walden, Upton and Shimkus:

Thank you for holding a joint subcommittee hearing on the impact of wildfires on the energy infrastructure and the environment. Wildfires are nothing new to Californians, and hospitals are as prepared as ever for when disasters strike. With durable backup generators, annual training, and comprehensive readiness plans, California's hospitals are havens in times of need.

Last year hospitals faced a new challenge: planned power shutoffs designed to prevent wildfires from sparking in the first place. Recent experience suggests these shutoffs are necessary to save lives.

Saving lives is paramount, of course, but hospitals — whose business is saving lives every day — are seeing troubling signs that the shutoffs are having unintended harmful effects. Examples of specific concerns include:

- Challenges, anxiety, and stress for nurses, doctors and other employees, preventing some from getting to the hospital when their own families and homes are out of power and schools are closed; this can lead to delayed surgeries and other treatment, such as chemotherapy and dialysis

- Patients who rely on a safe, powered home environment now needing hospital care; in one case, an elderly woman fell due to a lack of lighting; in another, a patient’s respiratory function was compromised due to a lack of power for a home ventilator
- Ensuring safe patient discharges, as patients who should be able to move to a nursing home or return home cannot without electricity; this leads to significant logjams at the hospital and patients receiving a higher, more costly level of care than necessary
- Patients enduring often uncomfortable pre-surgical preparation and anxiety only to learn elective surgical procedures have to be cancelled due to power limitations
- Risk to expensive technologies when imprecise communication from power companies prevents hospitals from properly powering down equipment prior to a shutoff
- Additional costs incurred by hospitals due to cancelled surgeries and procedures and employee overtime when engineers and facility teams are on around the clock and others work extra shifts as employees have trouble getting to work

These are just some of the ways the shutoffs have affected patients and hospitals, but even they can be endured for a short period of time. Of greater concern is the suggestion some have made that these planned shutoffs are a “new normal” for California, and could be in place for a decade or longer.

If true, that would create a virtual year-round disaster state, one where the adverse effects already seen in 2019 would be just the tip of the iceberg.

Put another way, it’s imperative that we understand fully whether public safety power shutoffs are jeopardizing public safety. If that’s the case, then the status quo is untenable, and the status quo for the next decade is unfathomable.

Thank you for your interest in the impact of the power shutoffs. We look forward to working with you to develop sound policies that protect lives — both during times of crisis and times of calm.

Sincerely,



Carmela Coyle
President & CEO
California Hospital Association

cc: Members of the California Delegation