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Court Rejects Oil Industry's Retaliatory Lawsuit Against L.A. Youth Groups

LOS ANGELES— A California appeals court today dismissed an oil-industry lawsuit against youth groups from South Los Angeles and Wilmington, the Center for Biological Diversity and the city of Los Angeles.

The California Independent Petroleum Association, which represents Exxon, Chevron and hundreds of crude-oil and natural-gas producers and related entities statewide, filed the suit after the groups won protections against neighborhood oil drilling from the city.

“Using lawsuits to shut people up has long been a part of the oil industry’s playbook, but the tides are changing,” said Kassie Siegel, director of the Center for Biological Diversity’s Climate Law Institute. “This decision affirms that communities have the right to demand protection from pollution without fear of retaliation from polluters.”

Oil and gas drilling releases toxic chemicals known to cause a range of health problems, from asthma and headaches to a higher risk of cancer. Drilling sites in South Los Angeles and Wilmington, neighborhoods that are predominantly black and Latino, are on average hundreds of feet closer to homes, schools and playgrounds than drilling sites in neighborhoods with larger numbers of white residents.

“For decades the oil industry has put our health and safety in jeopardy,” said Nalleli Cobo, an activist with the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition. “Now we the youth are fighting back, and we’re winning. It’s time for justice and it’s time to put people’s health over profit.”

In 2015, Communities for A Better Environment’s(CBE) youth group named “Youth for Environmental Justice” and the South Central Youth Leadership Coalition, joined by the Center for Biological Diversity, [sued the city of Los Angeles](#) for rubber-stamping oil projects in communities of color. Both sides reached a settlement in 2016 after the city adopted new requirements for drilling applications to ensure compliance with state environmental review rules and protect vulnerable communities.

The Petroleum Association then countersued the city and groups, arguing that the new requirements raised drillers’ costs without due process. The groups [filed an anti-SLAPP motion](#), which was denied by the L.A. Superior Court in an unexpected ruling.

Today's decision in the California 2nd District Court of Appeal reversed that decision, siding with the groups and dismissing the Petroleum Association's suit as having "no probability of prevailing." The court also said the decision "obliterates" the Petroleum Association's claim for nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in attorneys' fees from the city and groups.

"I'll never let the oil industry bully me into silence," said Briannnda Escobedo of CBE's Youth for Environmental Justice. "This win shows what happens when communities come together to stand up to polluters. It gives me hope to continue fighting for the healthy neighborhoods we deserve."

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

Founded in 1978, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) is one of the preeminent environmental justice organizations in the nation. The mission of CBE is to build people's power in California's communities of color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments.

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