

**CRISTINA GARCIA**

ASSEMBLY MEMBER

58TH DISTRICT

CAPITOL OFFICE  
P.O. BOX 942849  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0058  
PHONE: (916) 319-2058

E-MAIL: [ASSEMBLYMEMBER.GARCIA@ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV](mailto:ASSEMBLYMEMBER.GARCIA@ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV)



DISTRICT OFFICE  
8255 FIRESTONE BLVD SUITE 203  
DOWNEY, CA 90241  
PHONE: (562) 861-5803  
WEBSITE: [WWW.ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV/GARCIA](http://WWW.ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV/GARCIA)

## Press Release

**February 8, 2022**

**Contact: Ashley Labar  
(916) 319-2058  
(925)719-1298-Cell**

# **Assemblymember Cristina Garcia Introduces Assembly Bill 1857 to Move California Away From Dangerous and Dirty Waste Incinerators**

*AB 1857 will strengthen California's waste law and help California achieve its zero-waste goals*

(Sacramento) – Today Assemblymember Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) expands on her work to ensure state policies align with California's air quality and climate goals to better protect public health and the environment. AB 1857 corrects a deficiency in waste management law that has caused harm in overburdened communities for over three decades. It is past-due that the legislature update state-wide policy on municipal incinerators to better advance equity and sustainability in waste management law.

AB 1857 will remove the diversion credit for municipal solid waste incinerators and redefine the practice of incineration as disposal. The bill will also require CalRecycle to ensure that municipalities are prioritizing zero-waste strategies before constructing new incinerators. Further, the bill will make meaningful investments in zero-waste strategies, especially in frontline communities most impacted by incinerators.

“Municipal waste incinerators are a reminder of how environmental racism can become normalized as a policy neutral solution when the story is always more complicated. It is hard to ignore the 30 years of lived experiences from frontline communities which live near an incinerator and the scientific data that shows the harmful impacts from these facilities. Our state needs to turn away from municipal incineration as a viable option. Moreover, California needs to support zero-waste strategies with funding and policy changes to better leverage our investments going forward, stated Assemblymember Garcia (D-Bell Gardens).”

The last two remaining municipal waste incinerators are in environmental justice communities that shoulder the statewide burden of having trash burned in their communities. The Southeast Resource Recovery Facility (SERRF) in Long Beach and Covanta Stanislaus in Stanislaus County are both over 30 years old, making them incredibly dirty and expensive to maintain. In 2018 the Long Beach City Council approved \$8.7 million in upgrades to keep SERRF running through 2024.

These incinerators each produce over a hundred thousand tons of toxic ash per year, spew massive and extremely harmful pollutants like ammonia and lead into the air, and bring hundreds of diesel trucks into already overburdened communities 24 hours a day.

Instead of pushing cities to close down these archaic and harmful facilities, the State of California actually incentivizes them by awarding diversion credits for burning trash near Environmental Justice communities. The Integrated Waste Management Act (AB 939 in 1989) mandates that 50% of waste must be diverted away from landfills—this was intended to support zero-waste practices like recycling and composting but because lobbyists pushed to include incinerators in the program, municipalities are rewarded with diversion credits for sending their trash to be burned in overburdened frontline communities.

“For far too long our family and friends have had to breathe toxic air from the trash burned in our community coming from the rest of the state,” said East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice’s Zero Waste Community Organizer Whitney Amaya. “Our community deserves the same resources as affluent communities to have access to composting, improve recycling, and be part of the planning process to transition to zero waste.”

“In the early 1970s Modesto had one of the first curbside recycling programs in the country and now has none. Today the local area still sends its trash, even some recyclable and compostable items to be burned in the incinerator,” said Valley Improvement Projects(VIP) Co-Founder Thomas Helme. “We at VIP are hopeful the changes in AB 1857 will spare Stanislaus County and other overburdened communities from the harms caused by current law.”

“It’s time to stop sending our trash to be burned in already overburdened communities and calling it recycling,” said Nicole Kurian, Policy Analyst at Californians Against Waste. “AB 1857 seeks to correct this longstanding injustice and invest in real zero-waste solutions.”

“This measure embodies the multigenerational fight against incinerators led by frontline communities,” said Earthjustice Associate Attorney Byron Chan. “The proposal is a leap towards justice, and we are pleased that Assemblymember Garcia has introduced this bill.”

**The 58th Assembly District includes the cities of Montebello, Pico Rivera, Commerce, Bell Gardens, Downey, Norwalk, Bellflower, Cerritos, and Artesia.**

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