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April 14, 2021

Honorable Ben Hueso  
California State Senate  
Capitol Building, Room 4035  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 533 (STERN) as amended March 5, 2021 – SUPPORT**

Dear Senator Hueso:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports SB 533**. This bill is scheduled for hearing before Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications committee on April 19, 2021.

Over the past few years there have been massive deenergization events by large investor-owned electric utilities (IOUs) used as a proactive strategy to reduce the risks of igniting wildfires from the electric utility infrastructure and anticipated high winds. These deenergization events affected the majority of the counties in the state and resulted in mass disruption to schools, traffic, communications, business, medical providers wages, transportation and, importantly, to persons with disabilities and older adults dependent on life-sustaining electrical services and telecommunications.

These events interrupt the operation of medical devices such as ventilators, hospital beds, communications equipment, and power wheelchairs. They also affect the refrigeration of medication and food, the ability to enter and exit housing with elevator or lift access, and temperature control, among other serious consequences. Californians with disabilities have reported to DRC that they live in constant fear of when the next deenergization event will occur, and that preparing for de-energization drastically impacts the

already complicated routines required to use life-sustaining medical equipment. Others have reported experiencing severe harm during power shutoffs, including life-threatening situations.<sup>1</sup>

SB 533 makes several changes to mitigate the impacts of deenergization events on those communities and residents at greatest risk. First and most importantly, SB 533 requires utilities to improve their electrical systems and focus their efforts on those areas and assets that have been deenergized the greatest number of times. Deenergization events were envisioned as a last-ditch effort to reduce the risk of utility-caused wildfires after all other prevention efforts fail. Furthermore, these events were intended to be necessary as an interim solution while utilities performed the work necessary to reduce wildfire risk and improve system resiliency. Our overarching goal is that utilities will soon no longer need to call power shutoff events. The system upgrades required in SB 533 make great strides toward this goal.

SB 533 also facilitates the deployment of microgrids to provide local energy resilience. Development of a microgrid at these types of facilities would ensure that these facilities can be fully powered over extended time frames, thus maintaining critical operations necessary for the safety and welfare of the public.

For these reasons, DRC supports this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sawait Seyoum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sawait Seyoum  
Senior Legislative Advocate  
Disability Rights California

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<sup>1</sup> One client is reliant on a ventilator, oxygen machine, power wheelchair, power hospital bed, power lift, humidifier, airway path machine, and home climate controls to manage her disability. During a recent de-energization event, she reported that her ventilator back-up battery ran out of power. She was also unable to transfer out of her power wheelchair. [“Return to Main Document”](#)

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications  
Committee  
Honorable Henry Stern, California State Senate  
Gil Topete, Office of Senator Stern