

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 22, 2019

The Honorable Michael Picker  
President  
California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco CA 94102

Dear President Picker:

California's largest utility, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), has repeatedly demonstrated its failure to prioritize public safety. The result has been a series of unacceptable tragedies that have claimed lives and destroyed homes throughout northern California. The people of California depend on the Public Utilities Commission to regulate, investigate, and now remedy the conduct of PG&E. We urge you to be thorough and forceful in pursuing all reforms necessary to make public safety the central priority for PG&E and all of California's utilities.

In just the last decade, PG&E has caused or contributed to disasters that have killed more than one hundred Californians and destroyed more than 17,000 structures, including:

- In 2010, faulty welds on a 30-inch cast iron natural gas transmission pipeline from 1956 ruptured and caused a massive explosion in San Bruno, killing eight people and destroying 38 homes.
- In 2015, contact between a tree and a PG&E power line in Amador County sparked the Butte Fire, which killed two people and destroyed more than 900 structures.
- In 2017, PG&E equipment was found by CAL FIRE to be involved in starting 17 of the 21 large fires in Northern California that year. These 17 fires killed 22 people and destroyed more than 3,000 structures. Of these, CAL FIRE alleged that PG&E violated state law in 11 fires.
- In 2018, a 99-year-old PG&E transmission tower failed structurally, coincident with the start of the Camp Fire that killed 86 people and destroyed nearly 14,000 homes in the town of Paradise. As you know, that failure is still under investigation.

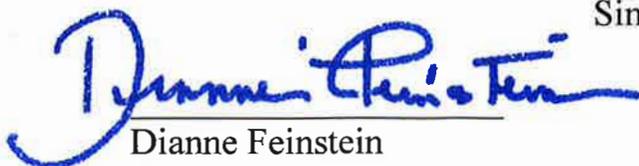
It is true that many factors contributed to these disasters, including decades of inadequate maintenance and an increasingly unstable climate; these are ongoing challenges that will require continued efforts to address. However, it is also clear that PG&E has repeatedly failed to prioritize the necessary repair and replacement of its infrastructure. There have been numerous examples of the company's failure to accept its responsibilities, including:

- In the investigation of the San Bruno explosion, PG&E attempted to mislead the National Transportation Safety Board. PG&E was convicted on this charge and five other charges of willfully violating the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1968.
- From 2010 to 2014, PG&E engaged in improper *ex parte* communications with the Public Utilities Commission, including in relation to safety regulations.
- From 2012 to 2017, PG&E is alleged to have falsified records relating to its services locating and marking natural gas pipelines prior to construction work.
- In 2015, the Public Utilities Commission fined PG&E \$1.6 billion for a combination of 2,425 violations of federal and state safety rules over the course of decades.

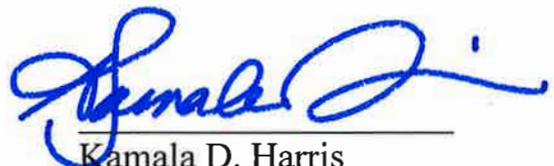
Even in the absence of these misdeeds, California would face enormous challenges in preparing for the rapidly worsening risks of wildfire and drought. We need our utilities throughout the state to be constructive, trustworthy partners in this effort. As the utilities' regulator, you have the authority and responsibility to fix this problem.

Thank you for your ongoing attention to this matter, including your open investigation of PG&E's safety culture. We ask that you keep us advised of your progress, and we will look forward to your conclusions.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator