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August 24, 2026

Via email

The Honorable Monique Limón, Chair
And Members of the Senate Committee on Rules
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 400
Sacramento, CA 95614

SUBJECT: Opposition to Rhys Williams' Appointment to Board of Environmental Safety

Dear Senator Limón and Committee Members,

The undersigned organizations, which represent frontline communities and concerned advocates, respectfully urge the Senate Committee on Rules to **reject Rhys Williams' appointment to the Board of Environmental Safety** ('BES', or 'the Board') due to his lobbying associations, which erode public trust and threaten the Board's effectiveness in overseeing California's Department of Toxic Substances Control ('DTSC').

Background: DTSC and the Board of Environmental Safety.

DTSC's work is critically important to public health and safety. DTSC oversees full and standardized hazardous waste permits and key site cleanups, levies fees on generators, tracks the movement of hazardous wastes, works to make consumer products safer, provides chemical expertise during emergencies, and engages in statewide planning to reduce hazardous waste generation and safely manage hazardous waste.

After decades-long concerns from communities, the Legislature established the Board of Environmental Safety through SB 158. The Board evaluates DTSC's performance and reports to the legislature, sets hazardous waste generator fees, hears permit appeals, and oversees development of a statewide roadmap for hazardous waste management.

The Board's mandate is to serve in the public's interest, particularly that of frontline communities.¹ The Board is meant to provide a platform to engage communities and their advocates about DTSC's activities, track agency performance, and improve transparency and outcomes. Maintaining public trust is therefore essential to the BES's effectiveness.

Mr. Williams' lobbying associations erode public trust.

Rhys Williams was appointed to the Board in January.² Just four months later, he registered as a lobbyist with Axiom Advisors, a lobbying firm representing multiple clients with financial or political interests in DTSC and the Board's work. These clients include:

¹ [Cal. Health & Safety Code § 25125 \(d\)](#)

² Governor Newsom announces appointments, January 2, 2026.
<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2026/01/02/governor-newsom-announces-appointments-1-2-2026/>

- **Clean Harbors**, which operates five facilities with full or standardized DTSC permits, including the hazardous waste landfill in Buttonwillow, as well as a number of other hazardous waste generating facilities.
- **GKN Aerospace**, which operates three hazardous waste generating facilities in CA, including one in Garden Grove, CA that recently experienced a chemical crisis and nearly resulted in a catastrophic explosion.
- **California Building Industry Association**, which engages in regulatory advocacy on issues relating to construction and land use, which may include fees and regulations related to contaminated soil and site mitigation.

These are just a few examples; the firm has additional clients that generate or manage hazardous waste, or have other interests in hazardous waste planning and regulation.³

We assert that someone who is an actively registered lobbyist at a firm representing the hazardous waste industry is not appropriate to serve on the BES. Recusal from matters relating to specific clients would not adequately address our concerns. For as long as Mr. Williams remains on the Board, community members and advocates may reasonably question whether his actions, statements, or silence are influenced by his firm's clients, or the interests of potential clients Axiom hopes to attract. The erosion of public trust in Mr. Williams' ability to represent the public's interest not only impacts his effectiveness as a Board member, but threatens the Board's integrity as a whole.

The revolving door & concerns about the disproportionate influence of private industry.

BES members must be appointed on "the basis of their demonstrated interest in the fields of hazardous waste management, site remediation, or pollution prevention and reduction."⁴ Mr. Williams' experience in these areas remains unclear. Until recently, he served as the Governor's Acting Deputy Chief of Staff and has held multiple roles within Governor Newsom's senior leadership circle over the last decade. In March the Governor also appointed him to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Recent reporting⁵ has highlighted a history of governors rewarding high-ranking staff with board and commission appointments, as well as longstanding concerns about the "revolving door" between government positions and lobbying or private industry, and the disproportionate influence of private industry interests on public policy.^{6,7,8,9} In this case, Axiom explicitly markets

³ For additional details, you may refer to a prior advocate letter regarding concerns with Mr. Williams' appointment to the BES (July 22, 2026): <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-9eAwNbqsMZlVyugiQdjmcDxWKZlo7VWcdVyaLS1UNw/edit?usp=sharing>

⁴ [Cal. Health & Safety Code § 25125 \(b\)](#)

⁵ Alejandra Reyes-Velarde and Jeanne Kuang. "Newsom appointed a close ally to this state board. Environmental groups say he has a conflict of interest." Calmatters, July 24, 2025.

<https://calmatters.org/environment/2026/07/board-environmental-safety-rhys-williams-resign-lobbying/>

⁶ Andrew Oxford. "California Climate Agency Insiders Turn Into Busy Lobbyists." Bloomberg Government, December 19, 2024.

<https://news.bgov.com/bloomberg-government-news/california-climate-agency-insiders-turn-into-busy-lobbyists>

⁷ Ryan Sabalow. "Do outgoing legislators 'shop' for lobbying jobs in final weeks of the session?" Calmatters, August 15, 2024.

<https://calmatters.org/politics/2024/08/california-legislators-job-hunt-conflicts-ethics/>

⁸ Jonathan Greenberg. "Former CA utilities commissioner exposes "regulatory capture" of agency." The Sonoma Independent, June 21, 2024. <https://sonomaindependent.org/2024/06/21/former-ca-utilities-commissioner-exposes-regulatory-capture-of-agency/>

⁹ Jamie Court. "CA Oil Well Regulator Steps Down One Week After Groups Complain to Governor About Conflict Of Interest In Decisions About Orphan Wells And Midnight Permits." Consumer Watchdog, August 9, 2024.

Mr. Williams' regulatory experience, his engagement with "*opaque regulatory boards*,"¹⁰ and boasts about the firm's insider "*access*"¹¹ to leaders and "*unmatched relationships*"¹² across all levels of state government and regulatory entities.

This revolving door of public officials- and regulators-turned-lobbyists and lobbyist presence on commissions and boards threatens the integrity of our government and harms public trust. Californians deserve confidence that their government is working to serve the interests of the people. The Senate Committee on Rules has an important opportunity to address revolving door practices and assert its role in protecting the integrity of our state's regulatory boards and commissions.

We respectfully call the Senate Committee on Rules to reject Rhys Williams' appointment to the Board of Environmental Safety. Mr. Williams' professional lobbying associations erode the public's trust in his ability to serve in this role, and threaten the Board's effectiveness.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding this letter, you may contact Ivana Castellanos, Toxics Program Manager at Physicians for Social Responsibility - Los Angeles (icastellanos@psr-la.org).

Sincerely,

(See signatures on next page.)

<https://consumerwatchdog.org/energy/ca-oil-well-regulator-steps-down-one-week-after-groups-complain-to-governor-about-conflict-of-interest-in-decisions-about-orphan-wells-and-midnight-permits/>

¹⁰ <https://axiomadvisors.com/about>

¹¹ <https://axiomadvisors.com/>

¹² <https://axiomadvisors.com/capabilities>

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