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May 15, 2024

The Honorable Pacheco
California State Capitol
1021 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 817 (Pacheco) Open meetings: teleconferencing: subsidiary body
Notice of Support**

Dear Assembly member Pacheco,

We write today on behalf of the Cities Association of Santa Clara County (CASCC), a Joint Powers Authority, an association of fourteen cities of the county and the elected representatives of more than 1.8 million Bay-Area residents. Since 1990, the city representatives have been gathering to discuss and find consensus and solutions for regional issues. The cities of our association are diverse and include cities of a few thousand people and a city of a million people.

On Thursday, May 9, the CASCC Board of Directors, at the recommendation of the Legislative Action Committee (LAC), voted to support Assembly Bill 817, which would remove barriers to entry for appointed and elected office by allowing non-decision-making legislative bodies to participate in two-way virtual teleconferencing without posting location.

Several members of the Legislative Action Committee and the Board of Directors have indicated that recruiting and retaining members of the public on advisory bodies, boards and commissions has become a true challenge post-pandemic. Challenges associated with recruitment have been attributed to participation time commitments, time and location of meetings, physical limitations, conflicts with childcare, and work obligations.

During the pandemic, public health precautions allowed for remote participation during public meetings, which resulted in increased accessibility and resident participation. Individuals who could not previously meet the time, distance, or mandatory physical participation requirements were able to become more engaged, increasing the diversity of input and thought on several critical community proposals.

Existing law (Stats. 1991, Ch. 669) requires local bodies to publish and publicly notice opportunities that exist to participate in and serve on local regulatory and advisory boards, commissions, and committees under the Local Appointments List, known as Maddy's Act. However, merely informing the public of the opportunity to engage is not enough: addressing barriers to entry to achieve diverse

representation in leadership furthers the Legislature’s declared goals of equal access and equal opportunity.

Diversification in civic participation at all levels requires careful consideration of different protected characteristics as well as socioeconomic status. The in-person requirement to participate in local governance bodies presents a disproportionate challenge for those with physical or economic limitations, including seniors, persons with disability, single parents, caretakers, economically marginalized groups, and those who live in rural areas and face prohibitive driving distances. Participation in local advisory bodies and appointed boards and commissions often serves as a pipeline to local elected office and opportunities for state and federal leadership positions.

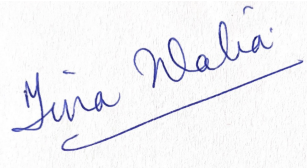
AB 817 would help address these issues by giving local advisory bodies the same teleconferencing flexibilities that state advisory bodies currently enjoy, so that equity in opportunity to serve locally and representative diversity in leadership can be achieved.

For these reasons, the CASCC is pleased to support AB 817.

Sincerely,



Neysa Fligor
President, Cities Association of Santa Clara Co.
Councilmember, City of Los Altos



Tina Walia
Chair, CASCC Legislative Action Committee
Councilmember, City of Saratoga