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Dear \*\*:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), League of California Cities (CalCities), City Clerks Association of California (CCAC), and California Association of Public Authorities for IHSS (CAPA-IHSS), we are pleased to sponsor this important legislation and thank you for your leadership in removing barriers to entry into civic leadership. We and the undersigned organizations write to express our strong support for SB 239 (Arreguín).

Advisory bodies exist to serve as the voices of our communities on a variety of issues, including civic matters impacting seniors, accessibility concerns for those with disabilities, representation for the LGBTQIA+ community, or the needs of youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. However, many advisory bodies frequently fail to meet due to inability to establish a quorum and difficulties to recruit and retain members of the community to serve. Over 90% of counties surveyed report challenges in establishing a quorum and 84% report difficulties in recruiting and retaining members to serve.

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 a disability, single parents or caretakers, or those who live in rural areas and face prohibitive driving distances. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, individuals who could not otherwise accommodate the time, distance, or mandatory physical participation requirements were able to participate remotely, gaining them access to leadership opportunities and providing communities with greater diversified input on critical community proposals.

SB 239 (Arreguín) would address these problems by allowing members to participate in meetings remotely without posting their home address or making it available to the public. The measure would improve transparency and ease of participation by the public by ensuring that meetings are available both in person and remotely whenever a member participates remotely or in person.

Existing law (Stats. 1991, Ch. 669) requires local bodies to publish and publicly notice opportunities 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.

Two years ago, the Legislature overwhelmingly passed, and the Governor signed, SB 544 (Stats. 2023, Ch. 216). Noting equity issues presented by physical attendance requirements, the bill provided teleconferencing flexibility to members of state bodies that are purely advisory in nature, just like those included in SB 239 (Arreguín). In order to achieve representative diversity in leadership and equity in opportunity at the local level, SB 239 (Arreguín) would extend these same narrow exemption for non decision-making legislative bodies not taking final action..

The public rightly deserves every opportunity to participate in their democracy. SB 239 (Arreguín) will improve on public accessibility in advisory body meetings by requiring meetings to be held online any time a member participates remotely and requires an in-person meeting location for the public regardless of how many members participate remotely. The bill also requires approval by both the legislative body that establishes an advisory body and the advisory body itself. Any elected official who serves on an advisory body is prohibited from using the flexibility provided by this bill and bodies addressing the issues related to law enforcement, elections, or the budget are exempt from the bill.

In total, SB 239 (Arreguín) will modernize the Brown Act for advisory bodies and improve representation by diverse communities while maintaining critical public accountability of their local government decision making.

For these reasons, we are pleased to support SB 239 (Arreguín) and thank you for your leadership on this most important issue.

If you have questions regarding this letter, please contact Eric Lawyer at (916) 767-9403, Johnnie Pina at (916) 802-4997, \*\*Dane/Ethan\*\* at , or Kim Rothschild at \*\*;

Sincerely,

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Eric Lawyer

Legislative Advocate

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Kim Rothschild…

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Ethan Nagler

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Dane Hutchings

\*\*

California Association of Recreation and Park Districts