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May 17, 2024

The Honorable Gail Pellerin  
Chair, Assembly Elections Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 365  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 251 (Newman): Candidates' statements: false statements.  
As Amended January 3, 2024 – SUPPORT  
Referred to the Assembly Elections Committee**

Dear Assembly Member Pellerin,

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 of the state's counties, I write in support of Senate Bill (SB) 251 (Newman), which raises the penalty for intentional false statements by candidates in elections from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Intentional false statements by candidates undermine the will of voters and heighten the risk that unqualified candidates are elected to office, specifically the role of County Auditors. Local elected officials serve an essential and often unappreciated role in their communities. The role of a county auditor, for example, performs vital functions including budget control, financial reporting, and managing disbursements and receipts. Due to the importance of that role, CSAC was proud to support AB 910 (Wilson) in 2023, which provided much-needed clarity for the qualifications for the office of county auditor and expanded the documentation that must be submitted to a county elections official to be a legal candidate for the office. SB 251 builds on those policies and further protects against the dangers of unqualified candidates being elected to office.

Further, the Elections Code Section that includes the fixed penalty amount of \$1,000 has not been updated since 1994 (Statutes of 1994, Chapter 920). The benefits of holding public office may simply outweigh the costs of the existing fine for an unscrupulous individual looking to advance their own interests at the expense of the communities they are intended to serve. While increasing the fine will not guarantee bad behavior will cease, it will help to ensure that our candidates for local office are qualified and properly vetted by their communities.

For these reasons, CSAC supports SB 251 and respectfully requests your AYE vote. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact me at [elawyer@counties.org](mailto:elawyer@counties.org).

Sincerely,

Eric Lawyer  
Legislative Advocate

cc: The Honorable Josh Newman, California State Senate  
Members, Assembly Elections Committee

The Honorable Gail Pellerin

May 17, 2024

Page 2 of 2

Ethan Jones, Chief Consultant, Assembly Elections Committee

Daryl Thomas, Policy Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus