



January 9, 2024

The Honorable Blanca Pacheco
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 6240
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 817 (Pacheco) Local Government: Open Meetings.
Notice of SUPPORT (As Amended 3/16/23)

Dear Assembly member Pacheco:

The City of Vista is pleased to express our strong support for AB 817, which would remove barriers to entry for appointed and elected office by allowing non-decision-making legislative bodies that do not have the ability to take final action to participate in two-way virtual teleconferencing without posting location.

The city recognizes the challenge of recruiting and retaining members of the public on advisory bodies, boards, and commissions. We understand the importance of diverse perspectives and expertise in decision-making processes. We are committed to finding innovative ways to engage and attract qualified individuals to serve in these crucial roles. Challenges associated with recruitment have been attributed to participation time commitments; time and location of meetings; physical limitation, conflicts with childcare, and work obligations. The COVID-19 global pandemic drove both hyper-awareness and concerns about the spread of infectious diseases, as well as removed barriers to local civic participation by allowing this same remote participation. This enabled individuals who could not otherwise accommodate the time, distance, or mandatory physical participation requirements to engage locally, providing access to leadership opportunities and providing communities with greater diversified input on 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 socio-economic 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 and/or 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 providing a narrow exemption under the Ralph M. Brown Act for non-decision-making legislative bodies that do not take final action on any legislation, regulations, contracts, licenses, permits, or other entitlements, so that equity in opportunity to serve locally and representative diversity in leadership can be achieved.

For these reasons, the City of Vista is pleased to support AB 817 and want to thank you for your leadership on this most important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Conley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Conley".

John Conley
City Manager
City of Vista

cc:

Congressman Mike Levin, Kyle.Krahel@mail.house.gov
Senator Catherine Blakespear, fernando.a.hernandez@sen.ca.gov
Assemblymember Laurie Davies, ryan.ewart@asm.ca.gov
Catherine Hill (CalCities), chill@calcities.org
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