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May 16, 2023

The Honorable Chris R. Holden
Chair, California Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 684 (Ta) County veterans service officers: additional resources - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Holden:

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties in California, writes in support of AB 684, which would provide a stipend, subject to appropriation by the Legislature, to counties who maintain a county veterans service officer (CVSO) on each active United States (U.S.) military base in their county. These additional county resources will help our newly separating veterans access their full Federal and California benefits.

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) reports that claims filed through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with the assistance of a CVSO have a higher rate of approval, demonstrating the value of CVSOs in guiding veterans through a complicated bureaucracy and connecting them to the benefits they deserve. Many veterans are unaware of the role CVSOs play and the resources they provide. In California the CACVSO reports that the state's ratio of veterans to Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) lags behind other states, resulting in a limited supply of VSRs available to service the largest veteran population of any state in the nation. Limited access to VSRs results in an estimated 65,000 veterans missing out on their benefits and roughly \$1.1 billion in VA benefits lost annually.

California is home to 32 active federal military installations across 21 counties. AB 684 will resolve this disparity and ensure that the tens of thousands of service members discharged from active duty each year in California receive access to an on-base CVSO and the veteran's benefits to which they are entitled. CVSO access expansion will help connect veterans to their well-deserved benefits, which will in turn help offset the high cost of living in California and assist veterans and their families remain in the state.

AB 684 will not only help bring Federal benefits to California but will also ensure the state is upholding its responsibility to its service members and assisting the transition to civilian

life. For these reasons, we respectfully ask for your support of AB 684. Please do not hesitate to contact me at kdean@counties.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kalyn Dean". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kalyn Dean
Legislative Advocate
California State Association of Counties

cc: The Honorable Tri Ta, 70th Assembly District
Members and Staff, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Joe Shinstock, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus