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July 7, 2023

The Honorable Anthony Portantino  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
State Capitol, Room 412  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 297 (Fong): Wildfires: Local Assistance Grant Program Advance  
Payments - As Introduced: January 26, 2023**

Dear Chair Portantino,

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 California counties, we are pleased to support AB 297 (Fong) which would extend the Department of Forestry and Fire Protections's (CalFIRE) ability to offer advance payments of up to 25 percent of the total grant reward from its Wildfire Prevention Grants program to January 1, 2034.

Mitigating wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface while simultaneously improving the health of the state's forests and wildlands is increasingly important as California's fire severity worsens statewide due to climate change. CalFIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program funds projects aimed at mitigating wildfire risk around communities and educating homeowners about home hardening and other necessary risk reduction measures to help safeguard them from the impacts of wildfire. Currently, the program can offer advance payments for up to 25 percent of the total grant amount to expedite projects; however, the advance payment provision will sunset on January 1, 2024.

Matching funding at the local level is challenging. The local entity not only pays for their share of the project, but also finances the State share until the State provides reimbursement. These types of financial challenges stifle the development of much needed wildfire mitigation projects and can delay critical comprehensive community programs.

AB 297 would extend the advance payment sunset to January 1, 2034, enabling CalFIRE to continue providing advance payments in order to expedite community wildfire mitigation efforts statewide. For these reasons, CSAC supports AB 297. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [cfreeman@counties.org](mailto:cfreeman@counties.org).

Sincerely,

Catherine Freeman  
Senior Legislative Advocate  
California State Association of Counties

cc: The Honorable Assemblymember Vince Fong  
The Honorable Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee  
Emilye Reeb, Fiscal Consultant, Senate Republican Staff