



September 12, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 557 (Hart) – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Newsom:

The undersigned organizations write to respectfully request your signature on Assembly Bill 557 (Hart), related to emergency remote meeting procedures under the Ralph M. Brown Act.

The changes made to California Government Code section 54953 by Assembly Bill 361 (R. Rivas, 2021) were of vital importance to local agencies looking to meet during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to continue to conduct the people's business. These changes were necessary to permit local agencies to meet during a time that would have otherwise been impossible to meet in person safely. Important safeguards were included to ensure transparency and accountability, including the fact that the emergency provisions were only applicable in instances where the California Governor had declared a state of emergency.

While California seeks to transition to a post-COVID era, the threat of additional emergencies remains, as has been made abundantly clear by recent flooding and wildfires. Absent any legislative intervention, the processes established by AB 361 to provide remote meeting flexibility to local agencies in emergency circumstances will expire at the end of this year. To remain best equipped to address future emergencies and allow local agencies to effectively react and respond, AB 557 would eliminate the sunset on the emergency remote meeting procedures added to California Government Code section 54953. Additionally, AB 557 would adjust the timeframe for the resolutions passed to renew an agency's temporary transition to emergency remote meetings to 45 days, up from the previous number of 30 days.

This legislation will preserve an effective tool for local agencies facing emergencies that would otherwise prevent them from conducting the people's business when faced with an emergency.

Amendments to the bill following its passage out of the Senate Governance and Finance Committee struck references to social distancing, eliminating any chance at interpreting the emergency remote meeting procedures as providing for a continuation of remote meetings absent an underlying state of emergency declaration. These and similar safety conditions are appropriately encapsulated under the general pretext for transitioning to emergency remote meeting procedures (i.e., that the state of emergency directly impacts the ability of members to meet safely in person). In this way, the bill continues to improve the efficacy of the underlying emergency remote meeting procedures while also making technical changes to accommodate received feedback.

For these reasons, the undersigned organizations respectfully request your signature on Assembly Bill 557 (Hart).

Sincerely,



Marcus Detwiler
Legislative
Representative
California Special
Districts Association



Eric Lawyer
Legislative Advocate
California State
Association of Counties



Carlos Machado
Legislative Advocate
California School Boards
Association



Johnnie Piña
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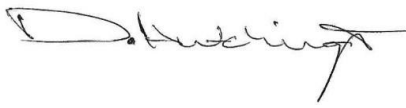
Sarah Bridge
Senior Director
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on behalf of
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Urban Counties of California

CC: The Honorable Gregg Hart
Ronda Paschal, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom
Emily Patterson, Chief Deputy of Legislative Operations, Office of Governor Newsom