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March 2, 2021

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: BUDGET RECONCILIATION LEGISLATION – SUPPORT FOR CORONAVIRUS
LOCAL FISCAL RECOVERY FUND**

Dear Senators Feinstein and Padilla:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I'm writing to request your support for provisions of the House-passed budget reconciliation bill (HR 1319) that would provide direct COVID-19-related financial support for California's counties. As the Senate prepares to vote on its version of the recovery package, I urge you to ensure that the legislation retains this critically important funding.

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic continues to have devastating impacts on communities across our state. Even as long-awaited vaccines are finally coming to market, thousands of new COVID-19 cases are reported daily. All told, California has confirmed nearly 3.5 million cases of COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic, resulting in over 50,000 deaths. As the frontline providers of local public health services – including contact tracing and disease investigation, testing, and large-scale vaccination efforts – counties are facing a daunting task in the months ahead as we work to mitigate and ultimately end the COVID-19 crisis.

Unfortunately, the immense scale of the pandemic and growing community needs continue to far outstrip our local resources. While previous state and federal support and emergency program funding has aided counties in pandemic response efforts, public health and other safety net program costs continue to mount and key local revenue sources remain severely constrained due to the persisting economic downturn. As a result, counties have had to dig deep into reserves, reallocate resources, and, in some cases, make difficult decisions to reduce services and/or eliminate staff. Looking ahead, and in order to continue to effectively respond to the public health crisis, counties must receive additional financial support from the federal government.

As you're aware, the House-passed budget reconciliation legislation includes \$350 billion in fiscal aid to states, local governments, tribes, and territories to help with ongoing COVID-19 response. We're extremely pleased that the bill would dedicate \$65.1 billion of this funding to counties of *all sizes* and that jurisdictions could use

the dollars in a flexible manner, including to replace lost revenues and to address the ongoing negative economic consequences of COVID-19. For California, this would result in an estimated \$7.7 billion in critically needed funding directly to our 58 counties. This federal fiscal assistance is long overdue and CSAC strongly urges you to support this critically needed funding in its entirety when the full Senate takes up the reconciliation legislation.

In addition to meeting unprecedented demands in the area of public health, California's counties are also responding to an increased need for other essential safety net services that Californians depend upon, including those that are geared to our state's most vulnerable populations. By way of illustration, local jurisdictions have had to direct additional resources to help house individuals who are at risk or experiencing homelessness and who are recovering, exposed to, or at high risk for medical complications due to COVID-19. Counties also are seeing significant spikes in the demand for nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/CalFresh).

Given the pandemic's far-reaching impacts, we strongly support provisions of HR 1319 that would provide targeted investment for a number of key safety-net programs, including TANF/CalWORKs, housing and homelessness programs, SNAP, child care, and adult protective services. The bill also would provide much needed support to speed up the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines across the country. Additionally, the legislation would replenish FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, as well as provide funding to local transit agencies to help with operating costs. Finally, HR 1319 would extend COVID-19 paid family and sick leave credits and allow state and local governments to access the tax benefit.

In sum, CSAC believes that the fiscal aid and programmatic support included in the House-passed reconciliation legislation would go a long way toward mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 while at the same time helping communities begin to recover from the pandemic and build resiliency. Again, I strongly urge you to vote to approve this critically important recovery package.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership. As always, we look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff.

Sincerely,



Graham Knaus
Executive Director

