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April 30, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5094
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anna Caballero
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #4
State Capitol, Room 5052
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Wendy Carrillo
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #4
State Capitol, Room 4167
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Proposal to increase local assistance funding for County Veterans Service Officers – Support

Dear Budget Committee Chairs:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I write to express our support for increasing local assistance funding for the County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) from \$5.6 million to \$11 million on an ongoing basis.

CVSOs are often the initial contact in the community for veterans who require assistance in determining federal, state, and local benefits available to them and their dependents. CVSOs provide help with claims, advocacy, and assistance with information regarding medical, pension and educational benefits, home loans, and more.

CVSOs help California’s veterans acquire hundreds of millions of dollars of federal benefits each year, scoring a high return for the funding the state allocates to them. Many veterans are unaware of the benefits to which they are entitled and the application process is complicated, so it’s no surprise that studies have found that veterans receive more benefits and larger awards by using CVSOs.

A state funding increase of \$5.4 million can be used at the local level to employ new Veterans Service Representatives at contact points such as VA hospitals and homeless outreach. California’s veterans are missing out on an estimated \$1.3 billion a year in federal benefits based on comparison with other states. An estimated 75,000 veterans and their families are not getting the benefits to which they are entitled.

CVSOs are critical for our veterans. Connecting veterans to the appropriate federal VA services, treatment, and cash benefits can often be the difference between being housed and being on the streets. The number of veteran suicides nationwide continues to rise, and approximately 14 of the 20 veterans who die by suicide

each day are not under VA care. This public health crisis requires an approach that meets veterans where they're located.

For the reasons above, CSAC supports the Member's Budget Requests from Senator Archuleta and Assembly Member Petrie-Norris to increase local assistance for CVSOs to \$11 million. Should you have any questions, please contact me at gneill@counties.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Neill', is positioned above the typed name.

Geoff Neill
Legislative Representative

cc: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on the Budget
Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on the Budget
Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs
Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs
The Honorable Bob Archuleta, California State Senate
The Honorable Cottie Petrie-Norris, California State Assembly
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers