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September 12, 2012

The Honorable Adam Schiff
2411 Rayburn House Office Building
Independence Ave. & S. Capitol St., SW
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 5870 – Disaster Declaration Improvement Act

Dear Congressman Schiff:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I want to thank you for introducing HR 5870, the Disaster Declaration Improvement Act. This measure would address an equity issue associated with the current disaster declaration process of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that places states with large populations, such as California at a disadvantage.

It is the overarching policy of CSAC to support legislative and regulatory proposals that maximize California counties' ability to effectively mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural and man-made disasters and public health emergencies, protecting both physical and fiscal health. Such proposals must recognize that the 58 California counties have unique characteristics, differing capacities, and diverse environments.

As you know, last year's windstorms in Southern California resulted in over \$30 million in damage. Unfortunately, these communities did not receive any federal disaster relief due to FEMA's reliance on a minimum dollar threshold for damages based on statewide population. We view FEMA's approach as contrary to our policy direction because their formula inaccurately assumes that states and counties with large populations have greater financial resources to respond to a natural disaster.

HR 5870 clearly moves in the direction of addressing this inequity in FEMA's disaster declaration process. We believe that HR 5870 would be of further benefit to counties if, as suggested by the California Emergency Services Association (CESA), it was amended to give permission to FEMA to recognize and consider less than the entire population base of any recognized political subdivision.

With this suggested amendment, CSAC would support HR 5870. Should you have any questions regarding our position, please contact me at 916-327-7500 ext. 511.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Keene".

Karen Keene
CSAC Senior Legislative Representative