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OPINION: WHY TYING COUNTIES' HANDS ON CONTRACTS WILL COST TAXPAYERS

By Leticia Perez, Kern County Board of Supervisors and
Moira Kenney, Executive Director of the First 5 Association of California

A bill in the Legislature would put a stranglehold on California counties' ability to provide cost-effective services to residents who need them most.

Assembly Bill 1250 – authored by Reginald Jones-Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, and sponsored by two labor unions, SEIU and AFSCME – is scheduled to be heard Wednesday by the Senate Governance and Finance Committee. It would handcuff counties and keep them from contracting with community-based organizations, nonprofits and local businesses.

The clear intent of AB 1250 is to prohibit contracting. It imposes severe restrictions and red tape on counties. It also requires community groups, nonprofits and local businesses to disclose personal information about employees and officers. This raises significant privacy concerns and will deter the private sector from providing services.

This will result in unnecessary gaps and delays in services, including safe havens and counseling for children who are victims of sex trafficking; 911 emergency dispatch and disaster response; homeless outreach and case management; newborn home visits; and foster care and adoption.

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The bill's sponsors want to force all services to be provided directly by counties so that they will increase full-time staff. But restricting counties from providing services in the most cost-effective manner will increase the bill for taxpayers and reduce funding for other services.

Counties strongly oppose this legislation, joined by nearly 200 community and faith-based organizations, and public safety, public health, mental health and social services advocates.

There is no legitimate policy problem that AB 1250 seeks to address. This a political power play at the expense of essential services for our most vulnerable.

Leticia Perez, a Kern County supervisor, is first vice president of the California State Association of Counties. Moira Kenney is executive director of the First 5 Association of California.