



September 10, 2025

SENATE FLOOR ALERT

SB 485 (Reyes) County public defender: appointment. As Amended September 4, 2025 – OPPOSE

On behalf of the state's 58 counties, the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the Urban Counties of California (UCC), and the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) respectfully request a **'NO' vote** on Senate Bill (SB) 485 by Senator Eloise Gómez Reyes. SB 485 proposes to change the employment status of county public defenders from at-will to one in which removal may only occur by a majority vote of the local board of supervisors for neglect of duty, malfeasance, misconduct in office, or other good cause.

SB 485 lacks key structural safeguards

- While the author and sponsors mirrored the bill with employment protections for county counsel, they intentionally omitted a critical provision that provides a four-year term for performance evaluation. Our previous requests for this simple amendment, which would have created parity with county counsel and established reasonable and essential checks and balances, was rejected.

SB 485 sets a new precedent for appointed county department heads

- If this measure were enacted, the public defender's employment status would be an outlier in the broader county organizational framework for all non-elected department leaders. Maintaining consistency and comparability across all appointed county leadership positions is integral to the balance of government.

SB 485 is a solution in search of a problem

- Counties deeply value the vital role public defenders play in meeting counties' constitutional mandate. However, we question the need for elevated employment protections as no specific, documented examples to justify a change have been provided, raising legitimate concerns about the necessity of this bill. In fact, there are very few examples county counsel can draw from where the at-will authority was ever exercised by a board of supervisors.

As organizations representing California's elected county supervisors, we urge your consideration of our concerns, which are rooted in principles of good governance, organizational consistency, and process clarity – standards we would be seeking to accompany statutory changes for the employment status of **any** appointed county department head.

Counties urge a 'NO' vote on SB 485.