September 17, 2024

Governor Gavin Newsom

1021 O Street, Suite 9000

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 2561 (McKinnor) – Local Public Employees: Vacant Positions - VETO**

Dear Governor Newsom,

The County of Siskiyou Board of Supervisors is writing to express opposition and strongly urge the veto of AB 2561 (McKinnor) regarding vacancy rates in local government departments.

County departments are tasked with challenging and complex tasks all focused on serving the communities in which they sit. Many of these departments require staff to handle confidential and personal information, utilizing and upholding laws and codes, public or individuals’ funds, and the like which requires staff members to be reliable, educated, and truly committed to the community and the tasks they are entrusted with. A department such as the Treasurer-Tax Collector’s, are responsible for fair and timely collection of hundreds of billions of dollars that in turn fund core public services, including K-14 education, health and public safety. Employees working in these offices must also responsibly invest and manage the public’s dollars. These are exacting tasks that require qualified, capable and trustworthy employees who will have access to sensitive information and collectively have billions of dollars under management.

While the private sector can pivot to provide more workplace flexibility and move services online to make working conditions more attractive to prospective employees, counties cannot. Core public services require open, staffed offices that are accessible to the public each business day. Ensuring access to public services is an impetrative task that every county government is faced with and is increasingly challenging for rural counties such as ours with large land mass and vastly spread populations.

Finding, training and retaining staff that must meet high standards in order to be given access to the information and money that are part of county functions may mean that at times, there is an undesirable level of vacancies within certain county offices despite ongoing recruitment efforts. Even while faced with these significant challenges,it would be ill-advised to lower the standards prospective employees must meet to fill vacancies in those offices – there is far too much at risk.

Within the past two calendar years, Siskiyou County bargaining units have experience vacancy rates as high as forty-seven percent. With great consideration to laws and funding restrictions required of many local government departments, several retention and onboarding incentives have been implemented to encourage higher application numbers, job listing referrals, and the retention of staff. In addition, our county’s Public Information Officer has significantly increased our social media/online presence and shares job listings through that to reach as many readers as possible. With these, and other, factors vacancy rates in 2024 are around thirty-seven percent. While it is common for certain positions to take longer to fill, efforts to find the most suitable candidate continue to be analyzed to appropriately adjust recruitment strategies.

Unfortunately, if this measure moves forward, it’s more likely that vacant positions would simply be eliminated in order to avoid the increased costs and workload that AB 2561 mandates – and mandates without any assurance that these additional mandates will result in reducing vacancies. If there are already vacancies in an office, the last thing the remaining employees need is new work that redirects their time and focus from directly serving the public. In fact, if this legislation is enacted, it would cause harm to existing and prospective public employees. To wit, either positions will be eliminated – affecting potential future employees as well as the work load placed upon remaining employees to satisfy the workload meant for a larger team of staff as well as the increased burdens being placed on the departments to comply with AB 2561. Departments serving small-medium counties, such as ours, face performing their duties with staff numbers much lesser than our larger counterparts. Further reducing these numbers will gravely effect not only our departments, but also the community in which we work tirelessly to serve.

And finally, counties and the State are facing similar budgetary challenges. Counties will do what is necessary to maintain balanced budgets, just as the State is doing. The Legislature has acted to reduce State costs and vacancies during this revenue downturn by eliminating positions. We truly do not operate with staffing numbers that would allow this type of activity to be in any way a ‘solution’. Rather, this type of activity would be detrimental.

Siskiyou County will be immensely and negatively impacted by this bill and for all of the reasons stated above, we oppose AB 2561 and strongly urge you to veto this measure. This letter was approved by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors on September 17, 2024, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Sincerely,

Michael N. Kobseff

Chair, Board of Supervisors

CC: Asm. Tina McKinnor

Members, Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee

Kalyn Dean, California State Association of Counties

Sarah Duckett, Rural County Representatives of California

Jean Hurst, Urban Counties Caucus