



June 26, 2024

The Honorable Catherine Blakespear
 Chair, Senate Elections Committee
 1020 N Street, Room 533
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2911 (McKinnor) – Campaign Contributions: agency officers – OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED

Dear Chair Blakespear:

As organizations representing a broad cross section of Californians, we write in respectful opposition to AB 2911 (McKinnor) as written that would undermine longstanding and recently passed protections against pay-to-play and conflicts of interests for our local democracies by exploding the Levine Act contribution limits by a factor of six, from \$250 to \$1,500.

The Levine Act was enacted in 1983 in response to a scandal reported in The Los Angeles Times in which several coastal commissioners explicitly solicited and received large campaign contributions from people who had business pending before them. Bias, corruption, and undue influence of these special interests in the decision-making process was rampant.

In 2022, the legislature extended the Levine Act to cover local elected officials by unanimously passing SB 1439. Prior to SB 1439, conflicts of interests by local special interests were so common in some communities that former Assembly Speaker Rendon called his home region a “corridor of corruption”.

The Levine Act’s limitations on parties, participants, and their agents from giving more than \$250 to officers of agencies from whom they are seeking a contract, license, or permit is critically important to

give the public confidence in the independence of agencies' decisions. This is also true of its recusal and disclosure requirements when excess contributions are made in the 12 months before decisions.

Massively increasing the amount developers and contractors can give local officials who are deciding on their proceedings is the last thing we should be doing when trust in government is so low. A just-completed California Clean Money Campaign poll of 839 likely California voters found that 81% would be concerned with raising the Levine Act limits to \$1,500, with 50% being "very concerned."

A much more reasonable increase in the threshold that is less likely to erode the public's trust would be to raise it to \$500. The poll showed that only 20% of likely voters would be "very concerned" about raising the threshold to that level, less than the 31% that said they would be "not at all concerned".

The notion that the Levine Act limit needs to be raised to allow candidates to run effective campaigns is demonstrably false. In fact, 13 cities ban contributions from developers, contractors or both while they have business before the city. Seven cities completely ban contributions from both then.

The cities that completely ban contributions from both developers and city contractors while they have business before the city range from a small city like Temple City, to moderate sized cities of Alhambra, Baldwin Park, Pasadena, and Santa Monica, to the very large cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco.

What the cities that ban such contributions show is that candidates and local elected officials don't need to raise large contributions from parties while they have business before them to succeed. AB 2911's massive increase in the Levine Act contribution limit to \$1,500 would not only be very concerning to voters about increased potential for pay-to-play, but it is unnecessary to allow candidates to be competitive.

In recent years, by passing historic laws like SB 1439, the California legislature has shown great resolve in leading the fight to address many of the concerns voters have about money in politics. We cannot go backward by weakening SB 1439 and the rest of the Levine Act as AB 2911 would.

It is for these reasons that we must strongly oppose AB 2911 unless it is amended.

Sincerely,

California Clean Money Campaign, Trent Lange, Executive Director

California Common Cause, Jonathan Mehta-Stein, Executive Director

California Church Impact, Libby Sholes, Director of Public Policy

California Climate Voters, Micah Perlin, Director

Californians for Disability Rights, Randy Hicks, Senior Attorney

Consumer Watchdog, Carmen Balber, Executive Director

Courage California, Irene Kao, Executive Director

Endangered Habitats League, Dan Silver, Executive Director

Indivisible CA: Statestrong, Dennessa Atilas, Senior Regional Organizer - West Coast

League of Women Voters of California, Dora Rose, Deputy Director

Money Out People In, Sheilah Fish, Founder

Money Out Voters In, Michele Sutter, Co-Founder

RootsAction.org, Bill Lackemacher, Digital Coordinator

Ban SUP, Cheryl Auger, President

Clean Earth for Kids, Suzanne Hume, Director
Contra Costa Moveon, Sheilah Fish, Leader
Extinction Rebellion San Francisco, Leah Redwood, Leader
Foothills Community Democrats, Melissa Taylor
Glendale Environmental Coalition, Elise Kalfayan
Indivisible Alta Pasadena, Anita Ghazarian, Leader
Indivisible Marin, Susan Morgan, Leader
Indivisible Media City Burbank, Marty Perimutter, Co Leader
Indivisible Sacramento, Tina Cahill, Leader
Indivisible Santa Barbara, Keith Carlson, Leader
Indivisible South Bay LA, Doug Bender, Co-Leader
Indivisible Ventura, Steering Committee
Indivisible Yolo, Steve Murphy, Co-Leader
Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers, Mike Draskovic, Co-Founder
Pink Panthers, Bill Sive
Progressive Democrats of the Santa Monica Mountains, Dorothy Reik, President
Recolte Energy, Gopal Shanker, President
Represent Us, Los-Angeles-San Gabriel Valley Chapter, Sean McMorris, Leader
Rooted in Resistance, Ruth Richardson, Co-Leader
San Joaquin Valley Democratic Club, Emily Brandt, Leader
Sonoma County Transportation & Land-Use Coalition, Steve Birdlebough, Chair
Unrig LA, Rob Quan, Lead Organizer
Venice Resistance, Jed Pauker, Leader
350 Conejo, Alan Weiner, Leader