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January 23, 2024

The Honorable Jim Wood
State Capitol, P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0002

**RE: AB 817 (Pacheco) Open Meetings: Teleconferencing: Subsidiary Body.
Notice of SUPPORT (As Amended 01/17/2024)**

Dear Assembly Member Wood,

The City of Arcata is pleased to express our strong support for AB 817, which would remove barriers to entry for appointed and elected office by allowing non-decision-making legislative bodies to participate in two-way virtual teleconferencing without posting location.

Arcata has greatly benefited from local residents sharing their expertise through advisory committees on topics ranging from energy to wetlands, historic resources, forestry, parks, economic development and transportation safety. Over the past five years the City has struggled to diversify these committees simply due to busy schedules and family barriers that keep good candidates from attending meetings in person. Challenges associated with recruitment have been attributed to participation time commitments, time and location of meetings, physical limitations, conflicts with childcare, and work obligations.

During the pandemic, public health precautions allowed for remote participation during public meetings, which resulted in increased accessibility and resident participation. Individuals who could not previously meet the time, distance, or mandatory physical participation requirements were able to become more engaged, increasing the diversity of input and thought on several critical community proposals.

Existing law (Stats. 1991, Ch. 669) requires local bodies to publish and publicly notice opportunities that exist to participate in and serve on local regulatory and advisory boards, commissions, and committees under the Local Appointments List, known as Maddy's Act. However, merely informing the public of the opportunity to engage is not enough: addressing barriers to entry to achieve diverse representation in leadership furthers the Legislature's declared goals of equal access and equal opportunity.

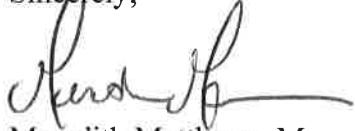
Diversification in civic participation at all levels requires careful consideration of different protected characteristics as well as socioeconomic status. The in-person requirement to participate in local governance bodies presents a disproportionate challenge for those with physical or economic limitations, including seniors, persons with disability, single parents,

caretakers, economically marginalized groups, and those who live in rural areas and face prohibitive driving distances. Participation in local advisory bodies and appointed boards and commissions often serves as a pipeline to local elected office and opportunities for state and federal leadership positions.

AB 817 would help address these issues by providing a narrow exemption under the Ralph M. Brown Act for non-decision-making legislative bodies that do not take final action on any legislation, regulations, contracts, licenses, permits, or other entitlements, so that equity in opportunity to serve locally and representative diversity in leadership can be achieved.

For these reasons, the City of Arcata is pleased to support AB 817 and wants to thank you for your leadership on this most important issue.

Sincerely,



Meredith Matthews, Mayor
City of Arcata

Cc:

The Honorable Assembly Member Blanca Pacheco

Senator Mike McGuire, Senator.McGuire@senate.ca.gov

Congressman Jared Huffman, John.Driscoll@mail.house.gov, Ciara.Emery@mail.house.gov

Assembly Member Jim Wood, Ruth.Valenzuela@asm.ca.gov

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