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May 6, 2024

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
Chairwoman, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Ste. 8140
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: OPPOSE, as amended March 11, 2024 – AB 2561 (McKinnor) Local Public Employees, Vacant Positions

Dear Chairwoman Wicks,

On behalf of the Solano County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to inform you that we must respectfully oppose AB 2561, which would require local agencies with bargaining unit vacancy rates exceeding ten percent for more than 180 days (approximately 6 months) to produce, implement, and publish a plan to reduce their vacancy rates to zero percent within the subsequent 180 days. The bill also requires the public agency to present this plan during a public hearing to the governing legislative body and to publish the plan on its internet website for public review for at least one year.

For counties, the issue of vacancies is particularly acute with the highest rates typically in behavioral health, the sheriff's department, corrections, and employment and social services. Local government decision-makers and public agency department heads recognize the impact that long-term vacancy rates have, both on current employees and those who receive services from those departments. Many specialty positions like nurses, licensed behavioral health professionals, social workers, police, teachers, and planners are experiencing nationwide workforce shortages and a dwindling pipeline for new entrants, driven by both an expansion of services and an aging workforce. To further complicate recruitment, local governments are competing with both the private sector and other government agencies. Local governments have been implementing innovative ways to try to boost recruitment and incentivize retention (e.g., sign-on bonuses, housing stipends, etc.).

Despite these efforts, vacancies persist; driven by several distinct circumstances. The public sector workforce has changed. In the post-COVID era, there is a much higher demand for remote work, which is not a benefit that can be offered within public agencies across all departments or for all roles. Furthermore, newer entrants to the workforce have changed priorities when it comes to the benefits and conditions of their work. Public employees were on the front lines of the COVID response. While the state passed legislation and the Governor signed executive orders and set policy during those challenging months, public agency employees were the vessel of service delivery and the implementer of those policies. This work was arduous, nearly endless, and seemingly thankless.

In conjunction with delivering on the policies and priorities set by the state during the pandemic, counties specifically have been burdened with several simultaneous overhauls of county service delivery, as mandated by the state. There is no doubt a correlation between the county programs dealing with the largest realignments of service delivery and structural overhaul as mandated in State law and those departments with the highest vacancy rates. Employees have experienced burn-out, harassment from the public, and a seemingly endless series of demands to transform systems of care

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or service delivery while simultaneously providing consistent and effective services, without adequate state support to meet state law. Obviously, it is difficult to retain staff in those conditions.

Unfortunately, AB 2561 would not help solve the problems outlined above, and in fact, would divert staff away from core service delivery, mandating they spend time producing reports on their vacancy rates instead. The total impact of mandated realignments without adequate concurrent funding and flexibility has also contributed to these vacancies. Adding another unfunded mandate on public agencies will not solve the problem this bill has identified. It is just as likely to create even more burn-out from employees tasked with producing the very report the bill mandates.

For these reasons, Solano County must respectfully oppose AB 2561.

Sincerely,



Mitch Mashburn, Chair
Solano County Board of Supervisors

CC:

Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Tina McKinnor, California State Assemblymember
The Honorable Bill Dodd, California State Senator
The Honorable Lori Wilson, California State Assemblymember
Honorable Solano County Board of Supervisors
Niger Edwards, Director of Human Resources, Solano County
Paragon Government Relations
Karen Lange, SYASL Partners, Inc.