April 1, 2021

The Honorable Alex Lee
California State Capitol, Room 2170
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 339 (Lee): Public Participation - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Lee:
The undersigned organizations are pleased to support Assembly Bill 339, which seeks to ensure that all Californians have the ability to participate in governmental decision-making by expanding opportunities to join public meetings and make public comment at both the local level and the state legislature by telephone or internet-based service options, both during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill also provides greater clarification of existing legal standards for interpretation services and language access.

Many of our organizations work with communities that face impediments to participation in the government decision-making process. Most people are unable to take time from their jobs or other obligations during the day to participate in public meetings. For rural residents and people without access to transportation, commuting to public meetings is effectively impossible. In addition, the millions of Californians who speak a language other than English require interpretation services to adequately participate in public meetings conducted in English. These communities deserve a seat at the decision-making table and a voice in policy decisions that affect them, and it is the responsibility of the government to facilitate their participation. Our democracy functions best when everyone – not just those who already have power – is able to participate in the public process.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote meetings have provided a unique opportunity for Californians across the state to better participate in both local and statewide government meetings. However, the pandemic has also illustrated how existing inequities such as lack of broadband access or language interpretation services create barriers that prevent many from accessing this opportunity. It has also highlighted the need for clear standards for remote participation that ensure that constituents are able to directly address their elected representatives. All Californians – regardless of their ability to attend meetings in-person or speak English – should be able to participate in the governmental decision-making process.

AB 339 would enhance public participation within local governments and the state legislature by ensuring that constituents have opportunities to join and comment at public meetings in-person, by telephone, and an internet-based service option. Additionally, language interpretation services would be available to all who wish to attend and comment at public meetings, and government bodies would have to have a system in place for requesting such services.

Clearer standards for equitable provision of access to public meetings are necessary to ensure a government that is accountable to all of its constituents. Our democracy cannot function unless everyone is able to participate equally - regardless of ability to travel, internet access, or language fluency. For all these reasons, we proudly support AB 339.
Sincerely,

Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability (Sponsor)
ACLU California Action (Sponsor)
Abundant Housing LA
ACT for Women and Girls
Alianza Coachella Valley
Alliance for Children’s Rights
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
Arts for Healing and Justice Network
California Children’s Trust
California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)
California Institute for Rural Studies
California Teachers Association
California Work & Family Coalition
California YIMBY
Californians Aware
Californians for Justice
Californians for Pesticide Reform
Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment
Central California Asthma Collaborative
Central California Environmental Justice Network
Central Valley Air Quality Coalition
Citizens for Choice Nevada County
Clean Water Action
ClimatePlan
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement
Courage Campaign
Cultiva La Salud
Dignity and Power Now
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Disability Rights Legal Center
Dolores Huerta Foundation
Faith in the Valley
Fairmead Community & Friends
First Amendment Coalition
Fresno Barrios Unidos
Fresno Building Healthy Communities
Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce
GenerationUp
Gente Organizada
Greenbelt Alliance
Hmong Innovating Politics
Housing Is A Human Right OC
INDIVISIBLE District 46
Inland Congregations United for Change
Inland Equity Partnership
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Jakara Movement
Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay
Justice LA
La Defensa
League of Women Voters
Los Angeles Sunshine Coalition
Mi Familia Vota
NAMLA
NextGen CA
NOlympics LA
Nuestra Casa
Orange County Emergency Response Coalition
Orange County Equality Coalition
Orange County LGBTQ Center
People’s Budget OC
People for Housing OC
People’s Collective for Environmental Justice
People’s Homeless Task Force OC
Pesticide Action Network
Planning and Conservation League
PolicyLink
Pomona Economic Opportunity Center
Public Advocates
Pueblo Unido CDC
Riverside NAACP
Root & Rebound

South County Homeless Task Force
Time for Change Foundation
TODEC Inland Empire
Unite Here Local 11
Voices for Progress
White People 4 Black Lives
Women for: Orange County
Yalla Indivisible
Youth Justice Education Clinic, Loyola Law School

cc: Members and Committee Staff, Assembly Committee on Local Government