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July 21, 2023

The Honorable Chris Holden
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 544: Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act: Teleconferencing

Chair Holden,

The Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG) would like to provide the following comments on [Senate Bill \(SB\) 544](#), which grants meeting flexibility to the state, local agencies and other advisory groups governed by the Bagley-Keene Act.

The DACAG is an 11- member group that was formed by Senate Bill 350, the Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015. The DACAG's role is to review CEC and CPUC clean energy programs and policies to ensure that disadvantaged communities, including tribal and rural communities benefit from proposed clean energy and pollution reduction programs. Group members are either from or represent disadvantaged communities.

SB 544 codifies Governor's Newsom multiple Executive Orders Order N-25-20 (Mar. 12, 2020); Order N-29-20 (Mar. 17, 2020); Order N-08- 21 (Jun. 11, 2021) allowing for public meetings to be held via teleconferencing, telephonically or otherwise electronically to all members of the public seeking to listen, participate, comment directly on agenda items or with commissioners, board or committee members. SB 544 would also waive the requirement of having the physical presence of members, the clerk or other personnel of the body, or of the public as a condition of participation in or quorum for a public meeting.

Since COVID-19, the DACAG has been meeting virtually and remotely, allowing for continued group member access, primarily from their residence or office without needing to secure a quorum or publicly notice their location. By switching to a virtual and remote setting, we have seen an increase in public participation, given the video/audio option provided and the lack of needing to travel to a particular meeting location. Our meetings continue to allow for ample public comment, at the beginning of the meeting, during each agenda item and at the closing of the meeting.

As stated by the Little Hood River Commission, "...remote access to all public meetings unquestionably increases the public's ability to monitor state government. The practical ability of board and commission members to participate remotely from their homes or private offices allows for this important segment of state government to increase efficiency, inclusion and flexibility." As this bill proceeds, we request that this bill include an emergency clause, allowing for the immediate implementation of the bill at the time of signing.

We do caution, however, on reducing public access to legislative or state body representatives. As its been stated above, we agree with the increased benefit virtual/remote access provides and we want to ensure members of the public still have access to decision-leaders face-to-face. We request that the author finds a solution to ensure we don't completely reduce the opportunity to engage with members of these boards, agencies and/or advisory committee in person.

We appreciate your time and consideration.

The Disadvantage Community Advisory Group

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