



April 10, 2023

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Hilary Peery
Meeting Planner

The Honorable Thomas Umberg
Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary
1021 O Street, Suite 6530
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 544 (Laird) Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act: teleconferencing - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Umberg,

The Health Officers Association of California, which represents the physician health officers of California's sixty-one city and county jurisdictions, supports SB 544 and asks for your "aye" vote when it is heard in your committee.

SB 544 will safeguard the personal safety and privacy of health officers participating in California Conference of Local Health meetings by eliminating the requirement for health officers to post the physical address of each member participating remotely in a meeting while increasing access to state body meetings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health officers faced numerous threats to their personal safety. These threats included physical violence, harassment, and even death threats. Some health officers were physically assaulted or verbally abused while carrying out their duties to protect public health. For example, a group of protesters broke into the private community where Santa Cruz County health officer Dr. Gail Newel lives, surrounded her home, and chanted "Gail to Jail". During a county Board of Supervisors meeting, a visibly agitated man lunged at her. After that, the sheriff asked Dr. Newel to stop attending in-person meetings, but her home was not safe either as the public had access to her home address.

This bill will protect the personal address of a health officer if they need to participate in a meeting remotely from their home, allowing them to carry out their duty to protect the public safely and with less fear of threats or attacks.

For these reasons, HOAC is proud to support SB 544 and asks for your "aye" vote on this important measure.

Sincerely,

Kat DeBurgh, MPH
Executive Director
Health Officers Association of California