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CITY OF LOMITA

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Al Muratsuchi
Assemblymember, District 66
Capitol Swing Space
1021 O Street, Suite 5610
Sacramento, CA 95814

via portal, <https://calegislation.lc.ca.gov/advocates>

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

Dear Assemblymember Muratsuchi,

The City of Lomita 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 the location. The provisions of AB 817 are consistent with Lomita's City Council approved Legislative Platform.

Lomita, like other cities, has faced difficulty recruiting and retaining members of the public on advisory bodies, board, and commission. Challenges associated with recruitment have been attributed to participation time commitments, time and location of meetings, physical limitations, conflicts with childcare, and work obligations.

Most recently, the City of Lomita began the lengthy process of reviewing and updating the General Plan after 25 years – a critical guiding document that will lay out long term programs, policies and decisions that will shape Lomita in the next 20-30 years. The City Council appointed 12 volunteers to serve on the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) which meets regularly over the course of the year. While the Committee was provided the meeting schedule in advance, staff receives multiple requests from members to call in or attend virtually as they must address unexpected personal obligations and are unable to post their location and participate in the meeting.

Additionally, 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. Lomita was in the midst of updating its Housing and Safety Elements during these emergency orders and can attest to the added

ease, accessibility, flexibility and convenience offered to our committee members and the public to maintain participation levels in all meetings.

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 Lomita is pleased to support AB 817 and appreciates your leadership on this most important issue.

Sincerely,

Joe Hoefgen

Joe Hoefgen
Interim City Manager

- c. Lomita Mayor and City Council
The Honorable Blanca Pacheco, assemblymember.pacheco@assembly.ca.gov
The Honorable Ben Allen, senator.allen@senate.ca.gov
League of California Cities, jkiernan@calcities.org and cityletters@calcities.org
Kathleen Gregory, Lomita City Clerk