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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

July 14, 2026

The Honorable Monique Limón
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Gregg Hart
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 6230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: **URGENT NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE TORT REFORM TO PROTECT CALIFORNIA TAXPAYERS, SURVIVORS, AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES**

Dear Senator Limón and Assembly Member Hart,

On behalf of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, I write to respectfully urge your support for meaningful tort reform for civil actions against public entities. A major driver of this issue is Assembly Bill 218 (2019), which reopened decades-old childhood sexual assault claims. New data released by the California Association of Joint Powers Authorities (CAJPA) confirms that public entity liability costs have tripled in the last seven years, now exceeding \$7 billion in known exposure. Costs are on pace to grow another 70 percent by 2027–28.

This fiscal trajectory is unsustainable, the structure of liability is fundamentally unfair to taxpayers, and the consequences are now measured in billions of dollars diverted away from essential programs and services that Californians depend on every day.

We are committed to ensuring that survivors of harm receive justice, support, and meaningful compensation and are not asking for insulation from accountability. We agree that survivors should have their day in court. We are simply seeking to fix a system that, as currently structured, transfers enormous wealth to plaintiffs' law firms and threatens the financial solvency of the very public agencies tasked with protecting and serving vulnerable community members.

We seek your support in advancing a comprehensive tort reform package for civil actions against public entities that, at minimum, includes the following:

- **Defined benefits** including caps on damages in civil actions against public entities, ensuring survivors and other injured parties are made whole while preserving the capacity to deliver essential public services.
- **Proportional (several) liability for economic damages** in civil actions against public entities, so that taxpayers pay only for the share of harm actually attributable to the public agency. This way the perpetrators bear the cost of their own conduct and not taxpayers.
- **Heightened evidentiary and procedural standards** for claims where witnesses, records, and evidence archives are absent or insufficient to assign culpability.

For the County of Santa Barbara, AB 218 claims have resulted in substantial defense and settlement costs. Many cases involve allegations dating back to the 1970s and 1980s, when records no longer exist and witnesses are unavailable, making the claims uniquely difficult to defend. The County has hired consultants to recover historical insurance information and has been able to recoup some costs, but many public entities—particularly school districts—have not been able to recover comparable amounts. Public entities, including some in Santa Barbara County, now face the real prospect of insolvency under the weight of these liabilities.

The County greatly appreciates your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Espinosa
Legislative Advocate