

The Board of Supervisors

County Administration Building
1025 Escobar St., 4th floor
Martinez, California 94553

John Gioia, 1st District
Candace Andersen, 2nd District
Diane Burgis, 3rd District
Ken Carlson, 4th District
Shanelle Scales-Preston, 5th District

Contra Costa County



Monica Nino
Clerk of the Board
and
County Administrator
(925) 655-2075

April 15, 2025

The Honorable Assemblymember Mia Bonta
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 390
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1288 (Addis) Registered environmental health specialists – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Bonta:

As Chair of the Board of Supervisors of Contra Costa County, I write to express our support for Assembly Bill 1288 (Addis), which would help expand the environmental health specialist workforce by extending the time in which local health/environmental health departments may train and employ a local Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) trainee from three years to five years.

In addition, AB 1288 was recently amended to include additional provisions to make it easier for people to become REHS trainees, allow them to successfully complete their trainee period, and allow more opportunities to take the certification test. Specifically, these provisions will redefine science degree requirements, opening the profession to a broader variety of college graduates with science and health care degrees. These additions will also increase the number of training topics local jurisdictions can cover to better prepare their trainees and lastly, amendments will update the composition of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee, making it easier for the department to conduct and administer the committee, including recruiting and retaining committee members.

Currently, certification for the REHS program is administered by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). The program ensures that certified REHS' have met adequate education, training and experience requirements and have passed a comprehensive state examination. While working towards certification, individuals may be employed as a REHS trainee by local health/environmental health departments for up to three years. However, limited examination offerings and strict time limitations governing how often a trainee may take the exam have resulted in trainees being reassigned or released – even if they wish to continue to pursue a career as a certified REHS. The current state exam passage rate averages around 60 percent, covering a breadth of key technical topics.

REHSs play a critical role in safeguarding our communities. In Contra Costa County, residents and visitors are protected by REHS employed by Contra Costa Health (CCH) who work to

reduce the incidence of illness or injury for people throughout our communities. They do this by monitoring and enforcing a variety of state and local laws, ordinances, and regulations. This is usually accomplished through permitting and inspecting facilities subject to CCH oversight including, but not limited to:

- **Food Protection:** REHSs conduct surveillance of a wide range of food establishments to ensure day-to-day operations are done in a safe manner to prevent food-borne illness.
- **Recreational Health:** REHSs monitor the construction and operation of all public pools and spas to prevent injury or illness from unsafe or unsanitary conditions.
- **Drinking Water:** REHSs oversee Small Public Water Systems, well construction and destruction, water haulers, to ensure drinking water is safe for public consumption.
- **Solid Waste:** REHSs ensure that once waste is collected at the curbside, it is properly handled at landfills, transfer stations, compost facilities, and recycling facilities.

REHSs were also key to Contra Costa County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic helping to set-up and staff clinics for testing and vaccines, perform public outreach, and conduct complaint investigations in addition to their day-to-day duties mentioned above. Local REHSs have also been deployed during the clean-up phase of some of our state's most devastating wildfires to help their counterparts rebuild their communities. The critical role REHSs play in safeguarding everyday life has cemented Contra Costa County's need to ensure a strong and robust REHS workforce to provide essential services to our communities.

Contra Costa County is optimistic that AB 1288 will help address some of the recruitment and retention challenges we are currently experiencing. For example, Contra Costa Health has faced significant challenges recruiting and hiring REHS candidates. Most potential REHS candidates are employed with other agencies, making it difficult for CCH to recruit these candidates and have them accept employment in the County. CCH would greatly benefit from having the ability to recruit and employ REHS trainees for a longer period of time to ensure that important regulatory programs are staffed to protect the public health of our community.

AB 1288 will assist CCH to strengthen and sustain our REHS workforce pipeline with a simple extension of the time needed to pass the REHS exam. While this provision will not solve some of the larger issues all jurisdictions face, it will expand opportunities for entry-level employees to continue their careers with local health and environmental health departments. For these reasons, Contra Costa County respectfully requests your support for AB 1288.

Sincerely,



CANDACE ANDERSEN
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Health Committee
Honorable Members, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Monica Nino, County Administrator
Dr. Ori Tzvieli, Health Officer, Public Health Director, & Interim Director of Contra Costa Health Services
Michelle Rubalcava & Geoff Neill, Nielsen Merksamer

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Clerk of the Board
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April 11, 2025

The Honorable Aisha Wahab, Chair
Senate Housing Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 3330
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 16 (Blakespear) – Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention program: housing element: Integrated Plan for Behavioral Health Services and Outcomes. – OPPOSE –
As Amended March 25, 2025

Dear Chair Wahab:

On behalf of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, I write to inform you of our opposition to Senate Bill 16 by Senator Blakespear. Strengthening the state's homelessness response system is one of Contra Costa County's top priorities. Unfortunately, this measure takes a misguided approach that will exacerbate homelessness and redirect funding needed for comprehensive services and housing for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Our county supports the creation of a comprehensive homelessness response system that has defined roles for counties, cities, and the state, and that would provide sufficient, ongoing funding to accomplish those defined responsibilities. The Contra Costa County Continuum of Care (CoC) unites over 50 organizations, cities, towns and individuals with a shared mission to prevent and end homelessness in Contra Costa County. Our CoC has worked collaboratively with cities and local partners to address the homelessness crisis, engaging in a planning process to develop a comprehensive regional homelessness action plan, reflecting mutual agreement on how to address homelessness in our region. Together, we have made collaborative decisions to address all aspects of homelessness response, including connecting individuals to health and human services, prevention efforts, conducting street outreach, supporting shelters, and operating permanent supportive housing. The CoC's plan was submitted jointly as part of the application for Round 5 of the Homeless Housing, Accountability and Prevention (HHAP) program and was approved by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

In contrast to this collaborative planning effort, SB 16 imposes an unfunded mandate requiring counties to cover 50% of the operational costs for city-run shelters, with no funding source provided. While counties are responsible for health and human services across their entire jurisdiction, this differs from the financial responsibility for operating shelters. Any county contributions to a city-operated shelter should be based on collaborative local planning, not a one-size-fits-all mandate.

The mandate in this bill applies to one aspect of the state's homelessness response system, at the expense of other programs and services needed for a comprehensive homeless response. SB 16 creates a specific funding obligation solely for interim shelters, which applies to only one of the three entities that receive HHAP funding. SB 16 will require counties to prioritize all resources for shelter operations, diverting funds from other services for homeless individuals, including permanent housing and social, health, and behavioral health services.

SB 16 is inconsistent with State priorities, including Rounds 5 and 6 of the HHAP program, which reflect a policy decision of the Governor and Legislature to prioritize utilizing funds for permanent housing before new interim housing. SB 16 instead moves the HHAP program away from prioritizing permanent housing and disregards the collaborative local decisions made with state direction and guidance in the recently approved regional plans. Instead, it directs only counties - not cities or CoCs - on how to spend funding for one specific aspect of homelessness.

In addition, SB 16 creates an unprecedented and inappropriate state review of county budgets by allowing HCD to review county financial documents to determine what level of funding a county can afford to provide for the shelter funding obligation. This is a unique and highly concerning proposal that reflects a lack of understanding about the complex nature of county budgets. Counties have very few discretionary dollars, as the overwhelming majority of funds managed by counties are dedicated to a specific federal, state, or required local purpose.

Without sufficient funding to address unmet needs, including for homelessness, Contra Costa opted to pass a local sales tax. Since its enactment in 2021, Contra Costa has invested an additional \$40.7 million in discretionary sales tax dollars to support efforts to build permanent supportive housing and affordable housing. This past summer, our County opened a new 54-bed permanent supportive housing complex in San Pablo. Permanent supportive housing has a 90% success rate in avoiding a return to homelessness, in contrast to temporary shelters. SB 16 would halt progress in investing local funds in long-term, evidence-based solutions to homelessness.

Contra Costa County continues to be a willing partner in finding solutions to enhance accountability and better serve and unhoused individuals throughout the state. Regrettably, SB 16 is contrary to these goals and, as a result, we must oppose SB 16.

Sincerely,



CANDACE ANDERSEN
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Monica Nino, County Administrator
Jami Morritt, Chief Assistant Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
The Honorable Catherine Blakespear, California State Senate
Members, Senate Housing Committee
Alison Hughes, Chief Consultant, Senate Housing Committee
Kerry Yoshida, Policy Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus
Misa Lennox, Consultant, Office of the Senate President pro Tempore
Michelle Rubalcava & Geoff Neill, Nielsen Merksamer