



February 3, 2021

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 4001
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assembly Bill 75 (O'Donnell)

Position: SUPPORT

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Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell:

The County School Facilities Consortium (CSFC), an organization representing 25 county offices of education (COEs) statewide with a focus on school facilities and construction, is writing in support of AB 75 (O'Donnell), as introduced December 7, 2020. This bill will place a new statewide school bond on the 2022 ballot, which is greatly important to schools in general and COEs in particular.

The School Facility Program (SFP) has been a great success, allocating over \$1 billion to COEs since 1998. COEs directly serve a diverse population of students with specialized needs on a regional basis, including those in special education, community and community day, and court school programs. These populations often require smaller class sizes and additional support services, in addition to specialized facilities. The SFP has been an important tool to make progress toward equal access to safe and educationally appropriate facilities for these students.

The SFP has been especially important to COEs because they lack access to capital resources that are available to their school district counterparts. COEs do not have the authority to issue local bonds, and are often dependent on the state to assist in meeting their facilities needs for vulnerable and at-risk students. For this reason, the SFP and the Financial Hardship program in particular have been a lifeline for many county schools that are unable to provide the full local match.

AB 75 creates new protections for small districts and COEs, improving their ability to access SFP funds. These refinements include a new grant to fund project and construction management services, for which small districts often do not have in-house expertise, and a reservation of bond authority up to 10% of the available New Construction and Modernization funds for small districts to ensure construction funds are available once the project is designed.

We believe AB 75 provides an excellent opportunity to refine the Financial Hardship program, and encourage you to consider inclusion of the following updates:

- Extend the Financial Hardship status approval from 6 months to 12 months.
- Adjust the treatment of savings for Financial Hardship projects, to either allow the district or COE to retain savings for other high-priority capital outlay projects, or to provide a proportional return of eligibility upon return of savings.
- Provide Financial Hardship projects a mechanism to adjust their apportionment to reflect actual construction costs.

CSFC is available to provide the county office voice in discussions about program improvements, state facility funding priorities, Financial Hardship, and other important policy issues.

We thank you for your introduction of this important measure and consideration of our recommendations.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ian Padilla", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ian Padilla
CSFC Legislative Advocate