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March 31, 2022

The Honorable Mike Gipson
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Room 8110
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Assembly Bill 1608 (Gipson) – County officers: consolidation of offices.
As introduced January 4, 2022 – OPPOSE**

Dear Assembly Member Gipson,

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) respectfully writes in opposition of your measure, Assembly Bill 1608, which would create unavoidable, significant costs to counties, while removing the existing authority of our 58 elected county boards of supervisors.

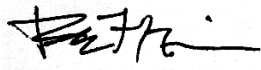
As introduced, AB 1608 strikes the authority of all county boards of supervisors to combine the duties of the county office of the Sheriff and coroner by way of ordinance. Currently, 48 of the 58 counties in our state consolidate the duties of the county-elected Sheriff and the coroner into a single office. The remaining counties have established an independent Office of the Medical Examiner or a coroner’s office that is separate from the Sheriff’s. Although AB 1608 does not require counties to create an independent Office of the Medical Examiner, many counties may be forced to do so given the high volume of cases they receive. If this takes place, projected costs to create and sustain operations of a medical examiner’s office would likely exceed \$1 million annually. Another option could be for a county to contract with neighboring counties and independent forensic pathologists, but as noted, it will not make sense for most medium and large sized counties with large caseloads. As currently drafted, a county is also permitted to consolidate the functions and duties of the coroner with other county offices, such as the public administrator. However, not only is it unclear how the administrative, medical, and investigative functions of the coroner could be consolidated with other offices, more notably it would require widespread changes with regards to staffing, resources, security, and physical space.

While prohibiting the consolidation of the Sheriff and coroner would be a substantial undertaking, impacting the budget of most counties across California, it would strip county boards of supervisors of their fundamental duty to make sound fiscal decisions on behalf of their constituents. Additionally, supervisors can exercise their existing authority to combine the duties of the coroner with other county offices if that is the will of the voters.

Ultimately, CSAC genuinely appreciates the intent of this legislation and is deeply sensitive to the concerns from the community. Thus, while we regretfully oppose AB 1608 as introduced, we look forward to continuing conversations.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 916.650.8129 or rmorimune@counties.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Morimune". The signature is stylized with a prominent initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ryan Morimune
Legislative Representative