

July 10, 2017

Senator Henry Stern
Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments
State Capitol, Room 2203
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 943 (Santiago) – Restricting Citizen Ballot Initiatives: OPPOSE

Dear Chair Stern and Members:

I write to join with the League of California Cities, Tenants Together, and others to express my opposition to AB 943, a bill that would restrict the power of citizens to use the initiative process in San Francisco and other California cities and counties.

AB 943 would impose a new 55% supermajority vote requirement on citizen-sponsored ballot initiatives related to land use in California cities and counties with populations exceeding 750,000. From my experience serving in the Legislature, I always found it to be poor policy to impose a supermajority mandate that shifts the power from the majority to the minority of voters. As we have seen with Prop. 13, eliminating the majority-rules standard can have severe unintended consequences.

By applying the new supermajority standard to all cities and counties with a population over 750,000, AB 943 would impose a form of one-size-fits-all planning limitations on local zoning controls. For example, San Francisco is the second most dense city in the nation with incredibly different housing requirements and land use needs than Ventura County and San Bernardino County. Yet AB 943 would impose the same blunt planning and zoning controls on them both. That would be poor policy.

Lastly, as the renters' rights organization Tenants Together wrote in its letter opposing AB 943, the bill's arbitrary and vague standard could be used to block measures that prevent unfair evictions and increase affordable housing. I spent much of my time in Sacramento working on these issues and do not doubt the good intent of the bill's author to find new solutions to our state's affordable housing crisis. However, AB 943 is the wrong approach, one that could easily make the housing crisis even worse.

I respectfully request that you vote No on AB 943.

Sincerely,

Mark Leno
Former State Senator

cc: All Members, Senate Standing Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments
Senator Scott Wiener
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago