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April 1, 2025

The Honorable Timothy S. Grayson
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Room 7250
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 315 – Quimby Act – Notice of Opposition (As Amended March 17, 2025)

Dear Senator Grayson:

The California Association of Recreation and Park Districts (CARPD) respectfully submits its strong opposition to Senate Bill (SB) 315. We believe this legislation would severely impede the improvement of existing parks and the development of new parks throughout California.

CARPD is a statewide association of recreation and park districts governed by independently elected local officials. Our members are vital stewards of California's local parks and open spaces, providing essential services and critical community infrastructure. We offer diverse recreation programs and serve as central hubs for millions of residents daily. Beyond recreation, our facilities play a crucial role in public safety, functioning as emergency staging areas during crises. Our parks, open spaces and facilities act as vital fuel breaks for wildfires, while our programs contribute to community health, youth development, and social cohesion. CARPD members are integral to the resilience and well-being of California's communities.

SB 315 would limit the amount of land dedication that a city or county can require of a developer to no more than 25% of the total acreage of an infill housing development. The bill would limit the number of acres of land used to calculate a park in-lieu fee, also known as a Quimby fee, to the proportional amount. SB 315 would also prohibit a Quimby fee altogether if the development is located within one-half mile of an existing park. In short, our members believe that this measure:

- **Ignores Cumulative Impacts New Zoning Laws Have on Changing Communities**
- **Giveaway to Developers with No Public Benefit**
- **Causes Bleak and Arbitrary Increases in Park Inequity**
- **Bad for the Environment and for Public Health**
- **Fundamentally Flawed with Vague Definitions**

The Quimby Act, originally enacted in 1965 through Assembly Bill 1150 and now codified in Government Code Section 66477, forms the foundation of park development in California. This legislation empowers local governments to require developers to either dedicate land or pay in-lieu fees for the creation of parks and recreational facilities within new residential subdivisions.

The Act’s primary objective was to ensure that urban expansion would be accompanied by adequate open spaces, designed to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of growing communities. This foresight has resulted in the extensive park system that millions of Californians enjoy today. Importantly, Quimby fees are structured to directly benefit the residents of the developments from which they are generated, creating a direct link between new housing and essential recreational spaces. The Act continues to play a crucial role in maintaining the balance between urban development and accessible green spaces across California. The vast majority of California’s regional parks would not have come into existence without the Quimby Act. SB 315 is therefore striking at the fundamental basis for recreation and park facilities in California.

The amount of parkland that a local agency can require under the Quimby Act is limited to three acres (or in some cases five) per 1,000 residents of the development. Alternatively, a developer can pay a fee in-lieu of a land dedication. This in-lieu fee, also known as a Quimby fee, is calculated formulaically by multiplying the number of acres of parkland that would have been required to have been dedicated by the per-acre fair market value of land in the community. Quimby fees are not income used to sustain operations or conduct maintenance. They are restricted, separate funds utilized only for purchasing the land for a new park, or increasing the capacity, the serviceability, and/or the lifespan of an existing park.

Quimby Act Land Dedication Calculation

amount of land required	=	average number of persons per dwelling unit	x	1,000 population ÷ park acreage standard (3 acres)
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Ignores Cumulative Impacts New Zoning Laws Have on Changing Communities

The proponents of this measure claim that SB 315 is reasonable and would have limited application given that it is focused on infill housing development. This logic fails to recognize the massive densities granted through the hundreds of new land use laws swiftly advanced by the Legislature over the past six years, including the ability for vacant retail and office space now being converted to high-density market rate multifamily housing. At the time of development, these were commercial and industrial zoned properties that were never subject to Quimby. In this ever-changing landscape of rapidly growing communities, we need to assess the impacts that a sweeping bill like this would have on California communities.

For example, our analysis of the City of Pleasant Hill’s Housing Element and designated sites for infill/rezoning reveals significant implications for park space requirements under SB 315. The analysis evaluated 11 sites with potential to accommodate between 1,644 and 3,290 new residents. Geographical assessment shows that all but one of these sites are within a half-mile radius of an existing park, most of which are adjacent to a park that is simply a field with park benches. However, only three sites currently meet the standard of 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, primarily due to their proximity to the City’s largest park. The remaining sites are classified as “park poor,” a legally recognized term indicating areas with insufficient access to parkland.¹

¹ https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=31158

While only one example, this analysis underscores the importance of carefully considering parkland requirements in relation to new housing developments, particularly in areas already designated as park poor.

Giveaway to Developers with No Public Benefit

SB 315 appears to be another developer giveaway that disproportionately benefits developers at the expense of community interests. The bill compromises community benefits while favoring for-profit corporations that do not have long-term stakes in the affected areas. This imbalance raises questions about the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in community development. A more balanced approach is needed to ensure that any concessions or fee reductions result in tangible benefits for residents and communities, not just increased profit margins for developers. Transparency mechanisms and accountability measures should be integral components of any legislation that aims to modify existing fee structures or community benefit requirements.

Our members acknowledge the challenges of land dedication for infill developments in urbanized areas. While the proponents of SB 315 may highlight high fees in certain jurisdictions, these cases are outliers. The highest Quimby fees are found in Santa Clara County, which has arguably the highest land values in the country—let alone in the state. However, the *average* Quimby fee across California is approximately \$11,000, far lower than these extreme examples. This average fee represents a small fraction of overall development costs yet plays a critical role in maintaining parks and recreational facilities that millions of Californians rely on daily. We believe that the vast majority of Californians should not be deprived of essential community assets due to concerns over fee levels in a tiny percentage of jurisdictions.

Modifying the Quimby Act based on exceptional cases risks undermining a system that has successfully balanced development needs with community benefits for decades. The Legislature's focus should be on solutions that address specific challenges in high-value areas without compromising the park and recreation needs of communities across California.

SB 315 proposes significant benefits to developers without implementing corresponding transparency measures. In recent years, numerous legislative measures have been enacted to reduce, cap, postpone, or defer development-related fees. However, these initiatives have not been accompanied by requirements for developers to demonstrate how these cost savings translate into lower prices for buyers or reduced rents for tenants. The lack of empirical evidence showing a direct correlation between these “developer giveaways” and decreased housing costs for consumers is concerning. Quimby fees, which typically constitute a low single-digit percentage of a project's overall cost, play a crucial role in maintaining the high standard of park amenities that residents have enjoyed for decades.

Moreover, limiting required land dedication to no more than 25% of the acreage of an infill development is not the answer to the housing crisis. This provision would mean that if a new development is 10 acres, the maximum amount of new parkland would be 2.5 acres, a significant decrease from the current average size of a park at around 15 acres. This approach punishes residents who live in denser communities and makes for irresponsible urban growth. The Quimby fee formula is currently three acres per every 1,000 residents. If a new development is 10 acres and has 6,000 residents, that means that the land dedication would be 6 acres. Under SB 315, that would mean a greater than 50% reduction in available parkland for these new residents.

SB 315 would also prohibit a Quimby fee if there is an existing park within one-half mile of the infill development. This requirement will be particularly damaging to residents near the new development. First, it will mean that existing parks in the community will become overloaded, diminishing their availability and enjoyability. Further, it will increase the cost of maintaining existing parks due to their heavier usage.

Although development has been prioritized, it has not actually translated to cost savings to a purchaser in any respect, or to more development. People want to enjoy parks as part of their community's environment and SB 315 will deprive residents of the benefits that parks provide. SB 315 therefore doubles down on what has not worked in the recent past. Our members understand that there is a housing crisis and that developers play an important role in the solution. Nonetheless, developers must be responsible partners in urban growth.

Causes Bleak and Arbitrary Increases in Park Inequity

SB 315 would drastically cut funding for new parks by limiting the required parkland dedication or in-lieu fees to 25% of the total development acreage. This arbitrary limit significantly reduces resources for park development, especially in densely populated areas where infill housing is common.

The bill's impact would be severe:

1. It drastically reduces parkland availability, far below the standard of three acres per 1,000 residents.
2. The resulting parkland would be classified as a "critically underserved community" by the California Department of Parks and Recreation.²
3. It exacerbates existing inequities in park access, particularly affecting low-income communities that rely on public parks for recreation and social interaction.
4. It overrides local decision-making processes, preventing communities from tailoring park requirements to their specific needs.

Research by the Trust for Public Land shows that historically underserved neighborhoods already have 44% less park space than other areas.³ Limited access to green spaces contributes to increased rates of obesity, depression, and heart disease—conditions that disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities.⁴

Parks are vital for community health, providing opportunities for physical exercise, community activities, and even serving as critical infrastructure during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent unprecedented wildfires. By severely limiting park development resources, SB 315 threatens to worsen existing health disparities and reduce quality of life, particularly in already underserved areas. This bill's one-size-fits-all approach fails to consider the varying needs of different communities and could have severe long-term consequences for the sustainability and quality of California's parks and the health of its residents.⁵

² https://www.parksforcalifornia.org/park_equity

³ <https://www.tpl.org/parks-and-an-equitable-recovery-parkscore-report>

⁴ <https://thehill.com/changing-america/opinion/555500-lack-of-green-spaces-in-under-represented-communities-is-a-health/>

⁵ <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/2022/11/16/federal-park-funding-reaches-underserved-communities-but-more-can-be-done/>

Bad for the Environment and for Public Health

Trees and vegetation play an important role in improving air quality by reducing various pollutants from the air such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter. The greater the land area of greenery, the greater these benefits for nearby residents. Trees and vegetation also play an important role in absorbing and storing carbon. Parks therefore play a crucial role in improving local air quality and mitigating climate change, as well as being an important dimension of a community's sustainability.⁶ SB 315, by reducing the amount of future parkland and kneecapping a local agency's ability to rehabilitate existing parkland to accommodate for large increases in new users, would decrease urban air quality and make it more difficult for California's long-term climate goals to come to fruition.

The amenities and services offered by parks and community centers are crucial in improving the overall health of communities. Californians have been grappling with mental health issues plaguing the entire country for several years; loneliness has been trending up and face-to-face interactions have been trending down.⁷ Parks offer inclusive spaces and services to residents that directly combat these issues. Team sports, art classes, summer camps, swim classes, and nature walks are among just some of the community building services cities and recreation and park districts offer on their parkland. Parks provide necessary natural spaces for gathering, socializing, and building community, all aspects of life crucial to improving mental health, especially in disadvantaged areas.⁸

Reducing parkland available to California's most vulnerable communities will only exacerbate physical and mental health disparities. Parks need to be able to provide spaces and services to improve the health of the most disadvantaged Californians. Parks need funding to thrive and do what they're meant to do: serve residents and improve lives. We've been led to believe that access to green space is a luxury when, in fact, it is a *necessity* for all Californians to live happy and healthy lives—something that the California State Legislature should prioritize.

Fundamentally Flawed with Vague Definitions

SB 315 is riddled with vague, undefined terms and fails to address crucial aspects of community planning and safety. The bill lacks clear definitions for critical terms like "infill housing" and "park," leaving room for misinterpretation and potential exploitation. It neglects to consider park poor communities or the complexities of urban landscapes divided by highways or other barriers that affect park accessibility. This shortsighted approach undermines the fundamental need for expanding and rehabilitating regional parks as our economy and urban areas grow.

Parks are not luxuries but necessities, serving multiple vital functions beyond recreation. They act as gathering spaces, emergency staging areas during crises like school shootings and wildfires, and even as natural firebreaks. During recent Los Angeles wildfires, parks saved lives by providing safe havens and impeding flame spread. By potentially limiting park development, SB 315 not only threatens community well-being but also overlooks parks' critical role in public safety and disaster resilience. This policy approach demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of the multifaceted importance of parks in our increasingly urbanized society.

⁶ <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/52881>

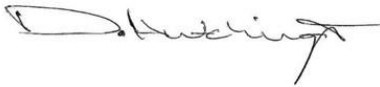
⁷ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

⁸ https://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/Parks-Rec-Underserved-Areas.pdf

SB 315 represents a fundamental attack on new and existing parkland in California. It would cause severe negative consequences for millions of Californians' daily quality of life. Our park districts rely on funding from the Quimby Act to plan and develop parks that meet the needs of our communities. The proposed changes in SB 315 would jeopardize our ability to fulfill this mission and would leave parks behind in future urban development.

For all of the reasons stated in this letter, we must oppose SB 315. Should you have any questions, please contact me at 916-974-9270.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dane Hutchings", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dane Hutchings
Legislative Representative
California Association of Recreation and Park Districts

CC: Members and Staff of the Senate Local Government Committee
Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas
Senate Majority Leader Mike McGuire
Office of Governor Gavin Newsom