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May 20, 2021

Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
State Capitol, Room 5094
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Philip Ting, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Jim Nielsen, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
State Capitol, Room 5064
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Vince Fong, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
State Capitol, Room 2002
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Urgent Request for Support for Recreation and Park District
COVID-19 Relief Funding in the State Budget**

Dear Senators Skinner and Nielsen and Assembly Members Ting and Fong:

On behalf of the recreation and park districts across the State, we submit this urgent request. Over the last several years, California's local park districts have continually been called upon during times of need. And every time, our agencies have answered the call. We now call upon our legislature to ensure that our recreation and park districts are not excluded from State funds and that these vital services are recognized for what they are: essential.

- We have played a necessary role in *disaster response* operating as evacuation centers and command centers during raging wildfires;
- We have been integral in *wildfire prevention* as we have maintained defensible spaces in aid of our fire agencies;
- We have served as *community cooling centers* during times of unprecedented heat waves;
- We have been confronted with the issues impacting the *unsheltered*;
- We have been advocates for equity working as an *affordable childcare* option to support front-line workers;
- We have served as *partners in K-12 education*, supporting and facilitating distance learners;
- We have positively contributed to the collective public mental and physical well-being by maintaining *safe and accessible outdoor spaces* for all.

Despite what our agencies have done to support California during these most turbulent of times, our agencies have been largely ignored when it comes to relief funds. With record revenue losses and covid-related expenditures impacting our districts' ability to continue to deliver high-quality services to Californians is at risk, the time for action is now.

Moreover, the State Budget has communicated the State's focus should be on the very services we provide: disaster preparedness, wildfire prevention, preventing learning gaps, and outdoor access for all: open space, recreation, and enrichment learning activities. Yet, despite these stated goals, the State Budget wholly fails to account for the role of recreation and park districts. This must be remedied.

We ask for your strong support and leadership to extend relief funds to all COVID-19 response impacted recreation and park and open space districts, and for all impacted special districts, who have done more than ever with less to support the state's goals – and more importantly, community needs – during this most challenging year. Special districts statewide and in dire need of relief for the continuance of the essential services we collectively provide. Without access to relief funds, our cumulative \$2.43 Billion fiscal impact will translate into lost jobs, reduced services and compounding economic consequences to our local economies.

If special districts are excluded from COVID-19 relief funds, essential frontline workers and community residents are excluded from relief. With a \$75 Billion surplus and \$27 Billion infusion of Federal assistance for COVID-19 relief, the state has the resources *and the explicit authority* to share – please do not leave communities and the local agencies who serve them behind. While some Californians receive similar services through cities and counties, many receive these services *exclusively* through special districts like ours. The fiscal impacts to these special districts are borne by the communities we serve, who absorb the impacts by way of reductions in staffing and service levels because we have been continually left out of federal and state relief funding; yet, nearly 60% of special districts provide essential services to under-served communities listed by the state as disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged who are least able to absorb these impacts.

Please support California's **recreation and park districts**, our frontline workers and volunteers and the vibrant communities we serve by providing COVID-19 funds to special districts in the State Budget. Alternatively, we would request infrastructure funding be allocated specifically to recreation and park districts to assist these agencies in the development of park facilities that serve the State's goals of disaster preparedness, wildfire prevention, and outdoor access.

If you would like to discuss further, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,



Matthew Duarte
Executive Director
California Association of Recreation & Park Districts

cc:

Honorable Members, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review
Honorable Members, Assembly Committee on Budget
Alice Reynolds, Senior Advisor; Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Christine Hironaka, Deputy Cabinet Secretary; Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Hazel Miranda, Deputy Legislative Secretary; Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Kip Lipper, Chief Energy & Environment Advisor; Office of Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins
Marie Liu, Consultant; Office of Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
James Hacker, Consultant; Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review
Christian Griffith, Chief Consultant; Assembly Committee on Budget
Kirk Feely, Director; Senate Republican Caucus
Emilye Reeb, Consultant; Senate Republican Caucus
Joe Shinstock, Fiscal Director; Assembly Republican Caucus
Kirstin Kolpitcke, Consultant; Assembly Republican Caucus
California Special Districts Association