



COUNTY OF SAN BENITO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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May 24, 2022

Assemblymember Chris R. Holden
Chair, Assembly Committee on Appropriations
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 1773 (Patterson): Williamson Act: subvention payments
As introduced February 3, 2022– SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Holden:

On behalf of the San Benito County Board of Supervisors, we write in support of Assembly Member Patterson's AB 1773; which would appropriate \$40,000,000 in the FY23 state budget to make subvention payments to counties to reimburse counties for property tax revenues not received as a result of Williamson Act contracts.

The Williamson Act is a state-established program that preserves agricultural and open space lands through property tax incentives and voluntary restrictive use contracts. In exchange for lower property taxes, private landowners enter into rolling 10- or 20-year contractual commitments with participating counties to keep their land in agricultural and/or compatible open space use. The Williamson Act has been very effective, protecting over 16.5 million acres or nearly one-third of all privately-owned land in California.

Of California's more than 100 million acres of land, 38 million are range and pastureland, resulting in a revenue of \$3.19 billion in cattle and calves alone. The mixture of annual vegetation, perennial grasses, and shrubs preserved in these open spaces provides forage for domestic livestock, and the countless species of wildlife that make their home in regions protected by the Williamson Act. Williamson Act subvention funds are critical to keeping this open space open for the benefit of all Californians. In a time where increasing land prices can offer a tempting reason for owners to parcel and subdivide crucial farmland and open space, the tax relief Williamson Act contracts provide offer even more enticing benefits to keeping working lands working, open and contiguous for the wildlife and agriculture that depend on them—and the counties and towns that depend on the promised funds from the state.

The Williamson Act was intended to be a partnership among the State, counties, and landowners. In exchange for implementing the state goal of farm and ranch land preservation, counties were to receive a partial replacement of their foregone property tax from the land enrolled in the program. State subventions have not been paid to counties since 2009. Without these payments, counties have struggled to fund public priorities, such as public safety staffing fully. State subventions were

one of California's rural counties' few discretionary revenue sources for local programs, including public safety.

Until it was eliminated in the 2009-10 state budget, state funding for Williamson Act subventions ranged between \$35 million and \$39 million. We strongly believe that reviving state funding for this program is cost-effective in preserving agricultural and open space lands.

We thank Assemblymember Patterson for taking a leadership role by authoring this measure which will help ensure the fiscal stability of rural counties. For these reasons and more, San Benito County supports AB 1773.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding our position, we ask you to reach out to our County Advocate, Michelle Rubalcava from Nielsen Merksamer Parrinello Gross & Leoni, LLP at mrubalcava@nmgovlaw.com or (916) 446-6752.

Respectfully,

Bea Gonzales
Chair of the Board of Supervisors
Board of Supervisor, 5th District
San Benito County

CC: The Honorable Jim Patterson
Members, Assembly Committee on Appropriations
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)