

October 24, 2016

Honorable Ben Allen  
Chair, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee  
California State Capitol, Room 2203  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Bob Hertzberg  
Chair, Senate Governance and Finance Committee  
California State Capitol, Room 408  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairman Allen and Chairman Hertzberg:

For more than 100 years, ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, has advocated a structure of governance that combines strong political leadership, effective and efficient administrative oversight, representation, accountability, and a commitment to results as the best strategy for ensuring a community's ongoing success.

Recently we became aware that the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee and the Senate Governance & Finance Committee have been asked to consider whether an elected rather than appointed county executive should oversee the day-to-day operations of California counties. Such a change goes against the type of governance discussed above, and ICMA strongly opposes such a change.

For a corporation or company to continue to grow and thrive in this global economy, it must be well managed, financially strong, and prepared for the future. Just as a high-performing corporation depends on an experienced, empowered CEO who is appointed by the board of directors to execute its vision, so, too, do those creative communities that are innovative, fiscally sound, and attractive to current and potential residents.

Functioning much like a business organization's chief executive, the appointed professional manager or administrator oversees the day-to-day operations of the community. Through a professional staff, this individual ensures the provision of services and enforces the policies adopted by the elected representatives. The appointed manager/administrator is selected by the supervisors on the basis of education, training, and experience, and so qualifications and performance—and not the navigation of the political election process—are the characteristics that make an appointed manager attractive.

Professional managers/administrators save taxpayers money by seeking the most efficient and effective way possible to deliver services. This does not mean that professional administrators always employ the least expensive methods. Instead, they take a long-term, integrated, and community-wide approach to service delivery that discourages organizational silos or decisions based solely on political agendas. They remove waste and eliminate duplicative processes and build consensus among diverse interests, promote equity and fairness, and develop and sustain organizational excellence and innovation. In short, professional administrators/managers strive for continuous improvement in the quality of life within their community—while also ensuring its financial well-being.

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With a professional appointed administrator in place, county elected officials are free to devote time to policy planning and development, knowing that their policies will be implemented efficiently, effectively, and ethically by a highly trained administrator. If residents are dissatisfied with the performance of the county manager or administrator, they have only to alert their elected representatives, which ensures the accountability of this position.

Appointed local government managers should be nonpartisan and have no guaranteed term of office or tenure, and they should be dismissible by the majority of elected officials at any time, for any reason. As a result, appointed managers/administrators constantly must respond to residents and be dedicated to the highest ideals of honesty, integrity, and excellence in the management and delivery of public services.

If the position of county manager/administrator were to be subsumed as an elected one, residents would be required to vote every so many years for the individual who would oversee the day-to-day operations of the county, almost certainly ensuring that this individual eventually would become less concerned about the administrative aspects of the position and more concerned about politics, specifically his or her reelection. The direct accountability inherent in the position would disappear, and the expensive and often complicated recall process would be the only course of action, should the position not meet community expectations.

Creating a vision for a community is key to its success and developing and articulating future directions is an essential element of strong political leadership. But while strong political and policy leadership can create a truly inspiring blueprint for a community's future, successful public sector organizations recognize that the other side of the equation involves the engagement of employees and residents and the efficient execution of the blueprint by an experienced, highly trained management professionals. Requiring this position to be elected would significantly change that equation.

We encourage the members of the Committee to reject any proposal that would provide for the election rather than appointment of a county executive to oversee the day-to-day operations of California counties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. O'Neill, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Robert J. O'Neill, Jr.  
ICMA Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee  
Honorable Members, Senate Governance and Finance Committee  
Darren Chesin, Chief Consultant, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee