



May 8, 2018

The Honorable Ricardo Lara
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 1303 (Pan) – Coroner: county office of the medical examiner.
As Amended on March 22, 2018 – OPPOSE
Set to be heard May 14, 2018 – Senate Appropriations Committee**

Dear Senator Lara,

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the Urban Counties of California (UCC) regretfully write in opposition of Senate Bill 1303 (Pan). Senate Bill 1303 mandates that non-charter counties with a population of 500,000 or greater abolish the office of the coroner or the sheriff's coroner's office and replace it with the office of the medical examiner—which the county boards of supervisors currently have the statutory power to do.

Specifically, under existing law, the board of supervisors may, by ordinance, abolish the office of the coroner and provide instead for the office of medical examiner, to be appointed by the board and to exercise the powers and perform the duties of the coroner. This bill would require non-charter counties with a population of 500,000 or more to create a separate office, and we believe this is unnecessary since under existing law counties may already make this change. County board of supervisors are in the best position to determine which model will best serve their communities both administratively and fiscally, and we oppose any efforts to make a blanket change without considering the local circumstances.

In addition, this bill would have a significant fiscal impact on the larger counties. As currently drafted, this bill would require at least six counties to create a medical examiner's office. Santa Clara recently created a medical examiner's office and reports that it cost the county nearly \$500,000.00, with ongoing personnel costs of over \$800,000.00. On April 24, 2018, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors voted to create an independent Office of the Medical Examiner. The initial estimated cost to create this new office is an additional \$1.3M ongoing cost to their current budget. An expenditure of this size could prove to be detrimental to a county's budget and the county board of supervisors is in the best position to determine if their county has the fiscal ability to absorb such an expense.

Finally, there is a nationwide shortage of forensic pathologists. A Department of Justice study estimated that there are only 500 Board Certified forensic pathologists in the United States that are currently practicing forensic pathology fulltime. (<https://www.justice.gov/archives/ncfs/page/file/641641/download>.) Senate Bill 1303 requires that the office of the medical examiner be led by a forensic pathologist—this could not only lead to recruitment issues, but it also puts these professionals in an administrative function, instead of performing exams.

In closing, we believe this bill would remove a counties local control to decide how to organize their operations and could result in unnecessary upheaval in counties. It is for these reasons that CSAC and UCC regretfully oppose Senate Bill 1303 and requests your **NO** vote. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Devencenzi, CSAC Legislative Representative at jdevencenzi@counties.org or Jolena Voorhis, UCC Executive Director at Jolena@urbancounties.com.

cc: The Honorable Richard Pan, California State Senate
Members and Consultant, Senate Appropriations Committee
Eric Csizmar, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus