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Executive Director

Dalia Navarro
Operations Manager

Huntington Sharp
Program Assistant

March 18, 2021

The Honorable Dr. Richard Pan, Chair
Senate Committee on Health
State Capitol, Room 2191
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: HOAC Opposes Senate Bill 744 (Glazer) Unless Amended

Dear Senator Pan:

The Health Officers Association of California (HOAC), which represents the physician health officers of California's sixty-one city and county jurisdictions, must regretfully oppose SB 744 (Glazer) unless it is amended.

SB 744 requires the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to post a weekly summary of viral respiratory diseases by county. This requirement should be modified to protect privacy by requiring CDPH not to release any information that could lead to the identification of an individual. If the numerator (cases) and/or denominator (population) in a county is too small, those numbers should not be included in the summary.

Unfortunately, we must oppose the requirement to publish data extracted from individual confidential morbidity reports (CMRs). Publishing information on individual data points is a violation of privacy, even when the name is removed; there is enough other information included that it could reasonably lead to the identification of an individual. Public health officers rely on medical providers for the timely reporting of disease cases so that we can monitor the health of our communities. This requires that we maintain the trust and confidentiality of patients and their providers. Publishing individual-level data would make it less likely that medical providers would be willing to report cases to the local and state health department. This would result in less data collection and worse visibility into contagious diseases in our state, not better.

CDPH publishes aggregate data that balances the need for information with the need for confidentiality. Individuals engaged in research can contact CDPH with IRB approval if they need additional data. It is not appropriate to broadly publish individual-level health data.

Should you have any questions regarding our position on this matter, I invite you to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Kat DeBurgh, MPH
Executive Director