



May 11, 2020

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 3224 (Rodriguez): Local health department workforce assessment
As Amended May 4, 2020 – SUPPORT
Set for Hearing May 18, 2020 – Assembly Health Committee

Dear Assembly Member Wood:

The County Health Executives Association of California (CHEAC), the Health Officers Association of California (HOAC), and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) California and respectfully urge your support of AB 3224 by Assembly Member Freddie Rodriguez which would require the California Department of Public Health to contract with an appropriate and qualified entity to conduct an evaluation of the adequacy of local health department infrastructure, including an assessment of future staffing, workforce, and resource needs.

As noted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a well-trained public health workforce is our first line of defense to prevent disease, protect health, and keep people safe. Local health departments play a critical role in the protection and promotion of health and well-being of California's communities and residents. This vital role has been most evident amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as well as numerous other local and state emergencies including public safety power shutoffs (PSPS), wildfires, and communicable disease outbreaks.

When not engaged in pandemic emergency response activities, public health is present in a wide array of critical work throughout our communities, including but not limited to public health nurse home visiting programs for new and expecting mothers, communicable disease surveillance and contact tracing, chronic disease prevention and wellness promotion, homelessness outreach, immunizations, environmental health (e.g. restaurant inspections), oral health services, and indigent health services. To carry out this work, local health departments rely on a workforce of highly trained and specialized public health professionals, including epidemiologists, communicable disease investigators, public health nurses, laboratorians, health educators, and others.

According to the California Future Health Workforce Commission, the public health workforce in California is chronically underfunded, and most local public health agencies lack personnel with expertise in key areas such as epidemiology and the essential skills to design, implement, and evaluate comprehensive approaches to community health improvement. Moreover, many local health departments throughout the state face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining well-qualified employees due to a lack of tools for recruiting, limited options for advancement, and instability of funded positions.

Because public health works to prevent diseases before they start, its work – and therefore its workforce needs – are often invisible. An evaluation of the adequacy of the local health department infrastructure, including an examination of future staffing, workforce, and resource needs, is needed to accurately and adequately fund local public health activities throughout our state. Findings and recommendations produced by this report will serve as an important roadmap for California's state and local governments in supporting the development and retention of a skilled and diverse public health workforce and will help build protections for Californians against public health threats.

As evidenced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the role and function of local health departments in California are critical in ensuring the health and safety of California's nearly 40 million residents. AB 3224 will support both the state's preparedness for current and future workforce challenges faced by local health departments, as well as preparedness for future emergencies or pandemics that may be faced by our state.

Local health departments are committed to developing and retaining a highly skilled and diverse public health workforce. It is for these reasons CHEAC, HOAC, and SEIU California respectfully urges your support of AB 3224. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Michelle Gibbons at mgibbons@cheac.org or (916) 327-7540.

Sincerely,

As signed by

Michelle Gibbons
Executive Director, CHEAC

As signed by

Kat DeBurgh
Executive Director, HOAC

As signed by

Libby Sanchez
Legislative Advocate, SEIU California

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Health Committee
The Honorable Freddie Rodriguez, Member, California State Assembly
Rosielyn Pulmano, Chief Consultant, Assembly Health Committee
Joe Shinstock, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus