



June 6, 2014

The Honorable Lois Wolk
 Chair, Senate Committee on Governance and Finance
 State Capitol
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2453 (Achadjian)--Paso Robles Basin Water District—OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED

Dear Chairwoman Wolk:

The undersigned organizations oppose the poor governance structure for a local water district under AB 2453 by Assemblymember Achadjian. While we support local management of groundwater supply, the candidate qualification and voting process to form and determine Paso Robles Basin Water District directors proposed in AB 2453 are unfair to local residents who do not own large acreage of land. As written, AB 2453 incorporates an acreage-based voting model to form and elect 6 out of the 9 water district directors and requires that those running for the position of director be landowners themselves. There would be nine directors elected to the board: two elected by large landowners, two elected by medium landowners, two elected by small landowners, and three members at large elected by all registered voters. The vote to decide whether or not to form this type of water district is strictly acreage-based.

This type of voting system and landownership requirements for water district directors will send a signal to local residents that their votes and opinions do not have the same weight as their neighbors who own land or more land. We would like to see a system where residents are treated equally regardless of the amount of

lands owned. This could be done by putting in place a one-voter-one-vote system and removing the landownership requirement for eligibility to be a director.

In the district that will be affected by this proposal, the ninety largest landowners control about 2/3rds of the acreage (188,000 acres out of a proposed 290,000 acre district). As few as 35 of the largest landowners could sweep the 11,000 registered voters (15,000-20,000 residents), who depend on wells for all of their water needs, and they will have no appreciable vote in the matter. One vote per acre essentially disenfranchises the residential population and tells them that their votes do not matter. Furthermore, having only landowners eligible to be water district directors further disenfranchises residents and tells them that those with their best interests in mind will not be able to represent them.

Once again, while we support the creation of a local entity that will oversee groundwater management and proper management of the Paso Robles Basin, we respectfully urge that this bill be amended to address our concerns. We believe that a democratic process will arm residents with the power to make local decisions that impact them just as much as their larger land-owning neighbors.

For the reasons stated, we urge your “NO” vote.

Sincerely,

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Director, California Coastal Protection Network

Noe Paramo
Legislative Advocate, California Rural Legal Assistance
Foundation

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Cc: Assemblymember Achadjian
Committee Members and Staff