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June 28, 2021

Honorable Mike McGuire
California State Senate
Capitol Building, Room 5061
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 339 (LEE) as amended June 25, 2021 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator McGuire:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 339**. This bill will ensure all Californians have the ability to participate in the governmental decision-making process by expanding opportunities to join public meetings and make public comment at both the local level and the state legislature via telephonic or internet-based service options, both during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill also provides greater clarification of existing legal standards for interpretation services and language access.

Some people with disabilities have expressed a desire to attend meetings virtually. It can be difficult for some with disabilities to travel and come into buildings for some meetings. Some people with mobility disabilities have talked about attending events virtually, including work, has helped some in the community maintain full time jobs.¹ The disability community has been detrimentally harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people with disabilities are immunocompromised and in order to stay safe have had to stay in their homes during the entire pandemic. Being able to attend

¹ Working from Home Has Helped me Keep a Full-Time Job. June, 2021.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/disability-57578287> "Return to Main Document"

meetings and work from home has been very helpful to people who need those types of protections. From an equity perspective, it is crucial that disabled people, especially those who intersect with other races or are low income, have access to the internet.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote meetings have provided a unique opportunity for Californians across the state to better participate in both local and statewide government meetings. However, the pandemic has simultaneously illustrated how existing inequities such as lack of broadband access or language interpretation services create barriers that prevent many from accessing this opportunity. At both the legislature and local governments, there is a clear need for reforms that ensure that all Californians – regardless of their ability to attend meetings in-person or speak a language different than English – are able to participate in the governmental decision-making process.

AB 339 would enhance public participation at the state and local levels by ensuring that constituents have opportunities to join and comment at public meetings in-person, via a call-in option and via an internet-based service option. AB 339 would also establish standards for posting both agendas and instructions for joining meetings via teleconference technology in a timely manner and at an easily accessible location online. Finally, language interpretation services would be available to all who wish to attend and comment at public meetings.

Clearer standards that ensure the equitable provision of access to public meetings are necessary to ensure a government that is accountable to all of its constituents, not just a select few. Our democracy cannot function unless everyone is able to participate equally - regardless of ability to travel, internet access, or language fluency.

For these reasons, DRC supports this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Harris", with a horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eric Harris
Director of Public Policy
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Governance and Finance
Committee
Honorable Alex Lee, California State Assembly
Allison Lim, Chief of Staff, Office of Assembly Member Lee