June 12, 2019

Honorable David Chiu
Chair, Housing and Community Development
California State Assembly
Capitol Building, Room 4112
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 329 (Mitchell) as amended May 17, 2019 – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Chiu:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, supports SB 329. This bill is set to be heard in the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee on June 19, 2019.

This bill would ensure California’s most at risk households have access to quality, affordable housing and neighborhoods of opportunity while we work to solve our unprecedented shortage of affordable housing. SB 329 would amend the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) to clarify that housing vouchers are included within California’s prohibition on discrimination based on source of income. This renter protection will help California address its growing homelessness crisis, provide opportunity to families in poverty, and ensure the state can take full advantage of available federal funding.

Our housing crisis is making the California dream impossible for our lowest-income families, even when they are able to secure assistance that promises to help them afford an apartment on the private market. Even with assistance, many individuals and families are unable to even apply for housing due to blanket policies of landlords who refuse to accept housing
assistance payments. Persons with disabilities often receive benefits and public assistance that is frequently refused.

As we work to address our housing crisis, we must also prioritize solutions that address the needs of families struggling with high housing costs. Solutions that allow low-income families to access existing housing are a critical component to addressing the crisis, and the Housing Opportunities Act represents one such solution. SB 329 would include housing assistance as a protected source of income under the Fair Employment and Housing Act. The effect of this change would be to prohibit discrimination against individuals and families based on the fact that they receive housing assistance, and would require that assistance to be treated the same as any other form of income. The bill would not affect the amount of rent landlords are able to charge for their units, or what criteria landlords use to screen their tenants; it would simply require landlords to treat families who get help paying their rent the same as other families who apply for housing.

SB 329's change to the Fair Employment and Housing Act was listed as the number one housing recommendation of the Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force, and this policy has a proven record of success. A recent study by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found that where source of income protections were put in place, families with housing assistance were half as likely to be rejected by landlords when applying for apartments. In addition, research shows that the policy can significantly improve the ability of families to access low-poverty, high-opportunity neighborhoods. The Housing Opportunities Act provides a chance for low-income families with housing assistance to access high-opportunity neighborhoods and stable housing. With a range of jurisdictions stepping up to address the housing crisis through these assistance programs, it is essential to ensure that assistance can actually be used by needy families.

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.
Very truly yours,

Curtis Child
Legislative Director
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee
    Lisa Engel, Chief Consultant, Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee
    Honorable Holly J. Mitchell, California State Senate
    Jorge Barajas, Legislative Aide, Office of Senator Mitchell
    William Weber, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus Committee