



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

March 17, 2006

The Honorable Shirley Horton
Member, California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2174
Sacramento, CA 95814

Michael E. Alpert
Chairman

Stanley R. Zax
Vice Chairman

Liz Figueroa
Senator

Daniel W. Hancock

Loren Kaye

Welton C. Mansfield

Eugene "Mitch" Mitchell

Pedro Nava
Assemblymember

Charles S. Pochigian
Senator

Leslie "Teddie" Ray

James E. Rogan

Audra Strickland
Assemblymember

RE: SUPPORT FOR ASSEMBLY BILL 1956

Dear Assemblymember Horton:

The Little Hoover Commission supports AB 1956, as amended March 15, 2006, the measure you have authored to establish a pilot program using a real time surveillance system for reporting to the Department of Health Services the emergence of communicable diseases. The Commission supports this measure based on findings and recommendations in its April 2003 report, *To Protect & Prevent: Rebuilding California's Public Health System*, and its June 2005 follow-up report, *Recommendations for Emergency Preparedness and Public Health*.

In assessing the State's preparedness shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Commission identified the public health system as the weakest link in California's homeland defense. It found that expert, technical and physical capacities and assets must be rebuilt and re-tooled to counter current and emerging threats. Specifically, poor communications and obsolete procedures used by the State hamper the ability of laboratories, medical providers and public health authorities to protect the public.

The Commission concluded that California must quickly develop enhanced capacity to respond nimbly to this century's highly complex health threats by employing the best of public health's scientific methods and tools available. For instance, real-time Web-based transmission of critical information and computer-assisted analysis and mapping should be employed in California's disease surveillance systems. Even absent an emergency, bolstering California's analytical capacity by using information technology, artificial intelligence, and evidence-based public health and medical practices will lead to higher quality, more productive and longer lives for its residents.

The Commission recommended the State install a real-time surveillance system that can quickly detect the emergence of contagious diseases, whether naturally occurring or the result of bioterrorism. Because AB 1956 reflects the Commission's recommendation, it is taking an active support position on the measure.

As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let me know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

Sincerely,

Nancy Lyons
Acting Executive Director

c: Commissioners