



State of California

# LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

August 11, 2011

The Honorable Jim Beall, Jr.  
Member, California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 5016  
Sacramento, CA 95814

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Stuart Drown  
*Executive Director*

**RE: SUPPORT FOR ASSEMBLY BILL 540**

Dear Assemblymember Beall:

The Little Hoover Commission supports AB 540, the measure you have authored regarding alcohol and substance abuse screening. The Commission's support is based on findings and recommendations from its 2003 report, *For Our Health and Safety: Joining Forces to Defeat Addiction*, and its March 2008 report, *Addressing Addiction: Improving & Integrating California's Substance Abuse Treatment System*.

In 2003, the Commission reviewed the state's alcohol and drug treatment system because of the immense role addiction played in the state's health, social and criminal justice programs. The Commission found that state and community leaders, lacking an over-arching plan, had not set priorities or directed resources to where they could do the most good. Policy-makers dealt with the symptoms, but not the root cause. The Commission recommended the state work with counties to set broad goals for treatment programs and help counties to ensure that treatment is available to those whose substance abuse imposes the greatest harm to their communities.

The Commission returned in 2007 to the topic of substance abuse and found that many of the same problems persisted. In addition, the Commission found that substance abuse was widespread among parents in the state's child welfare system, and that many newborns had been exposed to alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Too often, treatment remained an afterthought within the health care field.

The Commission has concluded that, as a first step in addressing substances abuse, the state must embrace a model for treatment that acknowledges it as a public health problem that requires distinct responses and incorporates a current understanding of effective treatment practices. One critical feature of this model should include validated substance abuse screening tools in virtually all health, human service and criminal justice systems.

Assembly Bill 540 addresses the Commission's concerns by establishing an Alcohol and Drug Screening and Brief Intervention Services Program in the Medi-Cal program. The Department of Health Care Services and Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs would provide reimbursement through Medi-Cal for screening and brief intervention for female beneficiaries who are pregnant or are of childbearing age. The bill also aims at better coordinating state and county programs. For these reasons, the Commission will actively support your 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,

Stuart Drown  
Executive Director

c: Commissioners