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Honorable Daniel W. Hancock, Chairman  
Little Hoover Commission  
925 L Street, Suite 805  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Hancock:

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you on the status of California's public health system. From my vantage point as the local health officer and public health director for Los Angeles County, and as a member of the Public Health Advisory Committee, I can say with full confidence that California's public health system is improving and growing more robust. The creation of an independent state Department of Public Health has already started to yield benefits in terms of higher prioritization of public health issues within Sacramento. I know that many of my colleagues throughout the state share my view that the California Department of Public Health, under Dr. Horton's leadership, is moving in the right direction, with an impressive cadre of recently hired senior staff, improvements made in the area of health facilities regulation, and a stronger focus on building the state's emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Additionally, I believe that the Public Health Advisory Committee has been established in a manner that will allow the Director of the Department of Public Health to receive expert advice as he manages a department that is responsible for assuring the health of over 35 million people.

However, I am concerned that California is still not maintaining sufficient capacities in certain core public health arenas such as laboratory services and surveillance systems. Furthermore, in this time of economic uncertainty, any budgetary cuts made in these core areas could severely jeopardize our state's ability to identify and respond to emerging public health threats. As your Commission's 2003 report "To Protect & Prevent" recommended and your 2005 report repeated, California must "prioritize public health spending as one of the core components of public safety, equal to fire and police" if we are to ensure the health and safety of our residents.

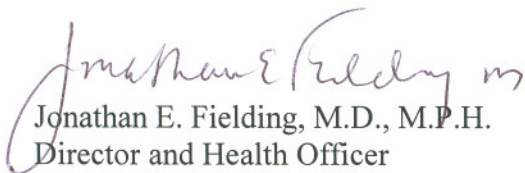
Another area which has been under-resourced is prevention and control of chronic diseases, which account for over 80% of the disease burden in our state. This percentage will only increase as the population ages. A new director for this area with excellent skills and experience has been hired, but she will be hamstrung without the financial ability to develop programs and policy recommendations on how to reduce the toll of these diseases.

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As your Commission considers the status of California's public health system, I also urge you to consider our state's need to build capacity and dedicate resources to address the social and environmental determinants of health. Although some may argue that this is a new direction for the field of public health to take, working on the social and environmental determinants of health actually brings our field back to its historical origins – working to influence the underlying causes of disease. If we don't consider the impact that our physical and social environments have on the public's health, we are consigning our state to face growing health disparities between different population groups, disparities that adversely affect the state's productivity and compromise our future prosperity.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify before your Commission.

Sincerely,



Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director and Health Officer

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