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April 16, 2026

The Honorable Henry Stern
Chair, Senate Emergency Management Committee
1020 N Street, Room 549
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 973 (Becker & Stern), Wildfire County Coordinator Program – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Stern,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong support for your co-authored bill SB 973 (Becker & Stern), which enhances California's wildfire resilience by strengthening county-level coordination, improving risk assessment tools, and formalizing the Wildfire County Coordinator Program.

Kern County is one of California's most wildfire-prone regions. Our communities, particularly in the Kern River Valley, Tehachapi region, and the wildland-urban interface areas, face increasing threats due to repeated drought events, fuel accumulation, and the growing number of residents living in high-risk zones. Effective wildfire mitigation requires consistent, well-supported local planning coupled with strong alignment across state, regional, and federal partners. SB 973 provides exactly that structure.

The bill offers several critical benefits by establishing statewide standards and tools for wildfire risk modeling, ensuring counties have access to reliable, data-driven information to guide planning and investments. It supports the development of county-level wildfire risk assessments, addressing a significant need for rural and resource-constrained jurisdictions, and provides clear guidance and templates for resilience prioritization and implementation plans that allow for consistency while accommodating local conditions.

Additionally, SB 973 codifies and expands the Wildfire County Coordinator Program to build sustained capacity for mitigation, prevention, preparedness, and recovery; strengthens coordination with CAL FIRE, Fire Safe Councils, local governments, and community partners; and requires the collection of data on mitigation activities, costs, and outcomes to help refine strategies and justify future funding needs.

Kern County has long emphasized the importance of home hardening, defensible space, community education, and interagency coordination. SB 973 supports and scales these efforts, allowing counties to better protect lives, homes, infrastructure, and natural resources.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors respectfully urges the Senate Emergency Management Committee to advance SB 973 without delay. Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing commitment to wildfire resilience across California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Phillip Peters", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Phillip Peters, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Emergency Management Committee
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Kern County Fire Department
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange