

[letterhead]

[ date ]

Senator Scott Wiener  
State Capitol, Room 5100  
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

**RE: Senate Bill 271 (Wiener): Sheriff Democracy and Diversity Act**

Dear Senator Wiener:

On behalf of [ name of organization ], I write to express strong support for SB 271, which restores California's long-standing eligibility criterion for candidates seeking the office of Sheriff. This bill will not prevent candidates with law enforcement experience from seeking or occupying the office. Instead, SB 271 will allow for a broader pool of candidates with more diverse skill sets, lead to greater gender and ethnic diversity in candidates, and provide for better management of Sheriff departments.

Current law requires that candidates seeking the office of Sheriff possess a certificate from the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) and some combination of salaried law enforcement experience. In 1988, this law was enacted in response to prisoners' rights attorney Michael Hennessey's successful campaign to be Sheriff for San Francisco County. These new eligibility requirements have restricted who can be Sheriff to a very narrow pool, and have led to elections without much competitiveness or differentiation between candidates. In 2020, sitting Sheriffs included only four females, three Latinx individuals, and two Japanese-Americans. There are no black Sheriffs. The remaining forty-nine Sheriffs are white males, which does not reflect California's demographic makeup.

**[ description of your organization and its experience of the problem ]**

Today, Sheriffs are essentially managers of a large bureaucracy. In large counties, they manage thousands of employees, the vast majority of whom are unarmed, non-sworn civilians. The three primary duties of the Sheriff are to police unincorporated areas, operate the county jail, and attend to and execute orders of the courts. In 41 counties, the Sheriff is also the Coroner whose authority includes investigating the cause of in-custody deaths. Sheriffs can be the most powerful elected official in a county and yet only a small pool of people may seek the position.

Protests against police brutality have called for elected officials to reimagine public safety by, among other things, shifting some duties away from armed officers to unarmed civilians and social workers. The criteria imposed under existing law has significantly narrowed the pool of

candidates for office of the Sheriff and makes it harder to reimagine our criminal justice system. As recent COVID-19 outbreaks in our jails demonstrates, the skills Sheriffs need to protect public safety include strong management, leadership, and the ability to move quickly and make difficult decisions, rather than the ability to fire a weapon. Lawsuits throughout the state are raising awareness of the dire inadequacy of health care and mental health services provided in our county jails. Moreover, the ongoing cooperation between many Sheriffs and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) further demonstrates that many elected Sheriffs do not share the values of their constituents.

SB 271 simply reverts California law to what it was from the State's founding until 1989 and thus allows voters to choose from a broader pool of candidates with more diverse backgrounds and skill sets and greater accountability.

Sincerely,

**[NAME & TITLE]**

**[INCL. CONTACT INFO]**

Cc: Angela Hill, Legislative Director