UNITED NEIGHBORHOODS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

United Neighborhoods of the Historic
Arlington Heights, West Adams,
and Jefferson Park Communities
Neighborhood Council

July 30, 2025

Honorable Assemblyman Isaac Bryan
California State Assembly District 55
1021 O Street, Suite 5630; P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, California 94249-0055
via email

RE: Opposition to California Senate Bill 79, *Housing development: transit-oriented development: California Environmental Quality Act: public transit agency land*

Dear Assemblyman Bryan,

The United Neighborhoods Neighborhood Council (UNNC) represents the historic neighborhoods of Arlington Heights, West Adams and Jefferson Park, all within the 55th Assembly district. UNNC's Governing Board voted during its meeting on June 5, 2025, to *ask that you vote NO on the above referenced Senate Bill 79 when it comes before the State Assembly* as this bill will have a substantive negative impact on your and our constituents.

UNNC has a long record of supporting equity and diversity in affordable housing. UNNC also supports major housing and mixed-use projects along our corridors instead of in stable character and historic neighborhoods. As you know, LA's housing crisis is experienced by people who are unhoused and Angelenos at risk of losing their homes. As noted by the Los Angeles City Council members John S. Lee and Traci Park in a resolution referred to the Council's Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations Committee:

> "*…while the intent of SB 79 may be to address issues around the supply of housing, the bill's provisions further undermines local governance, circumvents local decision-making processes, and imposes unintended burdens on communities….*"[1]

SB79 does NOT require sufficient affordable housing or any housing for the homeless.
The highest priority for any housing bill should be a substantial increase in housing for extremely low income (ELI) and very low income (VLI) renters as well as housing and services for the homeless. Rather than benefiting such individuals, families, and communities, SB79 will destroy their permanent and often affordable housing**.** The primary benefits of the bill will accrue to developers, land speculators, and financiers seeking to build new largely market-rate six to seven story apartment

[1] John S. Lee (Los Angeles City Council District 12) and Traci Park (Los Angeles City Council District 11), *Resolution Referred to the Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations*, LACityClerk Connect Council File Management System, *Council File: 25-0002-S19:* (accessed June 5, 2025)

buildings (with density bonuses buildings could be 10.5 stories) on properties which are often rent-controlled, naturally-occurring affordable, single and multi-family sites.

The bill makes little provision for ELI and VLI renters (and no provision for homeless) with the largest benefits accruing to market rate and so-called "low income" renters. It is critical to note that the 2025 "low income" designation is set at $84,850/year[2] or $12,000/year more than the City of Los Angeles, Planning Department, Planning Assistant full time salary ($72,578/year)[3]. Per the most recent census, Council District 10 has "*a lower median household income… and a higher percentage of residents living in poverty than [the] city average*"[4] and the average per capita income for Assembly District 55 is $57, 293[5] or just above the VLI level of $53,000.

The absence of substantial ELI and VLI affordable housing from SB 79 does NOT serve our shared community and others in Los Angeles for whom affordable housing is the most pressing need.

UNNC stands with other Los Angeles Neighborhood Councils[6], Los Angeles City Attorney Hydee Feldstein-Soto, and more than 100 California cities that officially oppose SB79.[7]

SB 79 is an unfunded mandate for cities like Los Angeles that can ill afford additional costs to provide customary and necessary services. City Attorney Feldstein-Soto indicated in a May 23, 2025, letter to the Chair of the State Senate Appropriations Committee Anna Caballero:

> *"While the intent of SB 79 is to further address issues around the supply of housing, the bill's provisions impermissibly impose billions of dollars of costs on Los Angeles and other local jurisdictions, undermine local governance, circumvent local decision-making processes, and impose unintended burdens on communities…".*[8]

City Attorney Feldstein Soto highlighted in the same letter that SB79 does NOT include any funding for the approximately $1.6B in necessary infrastructure upgrades and enhancements to first responder budgets in the City of Los Angeles alone, to support the high-density developments required by the Bill.

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[2] Los Angeles County, Department of Regional Planning, *Los Angeles County Affordable Housing Program INCOME LIMITS Effective 5/12/2025* (accessed July 26, 2025).
[3] City of Los Angeles, Career Pages, *PLANNING ASSISTANT 7939 (Revised 09-23-24)* (accessed July 26, 2025).
[4] Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti, *LA Census 2020 Citywide* (accessed July 25, 2025).
[5] Census Reporter, *Assembly District 55* (accessed July 25, 2025).
[6] LACityClerk Connect Council File Management System, *Council File: 25-0002-S19* (Accessed June 4, 2025 https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=25-0002-S19)
[7] CA Senate Rules Committee, *Senate Floor Analyses*; June 2, 2025 (Accessed June 4, 2025 https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml).
[8] City Attorney Hydee Feldstein-Soto to State Senator Anna Caballero, *SB 79 (Wiener) – OPPOSE Unless Amended*, May 23, 2025.

The City Attorney states that such costs are a "*constitutionally required reimbursement from the State.*"[9] The passage of SB79 without the provision of funds to pay for substantial infrastructure costs that result from implementation of the bill:

- Constitute an illegal unfunded mandate to support infrastructure expansion, administrative and legal costs. and
- Will result in substantial unplanned costs to Angelenos for the necessary upgrades through increased taxes, higher utility rates, etc.

SB79 is bad urban planning. It will:

- Destroy neighborhoods and communities by overriding existing zoning within a half mile of major rail/bus stops without ensuring housing affordability;
- Destroy hard-won generational equity in single family homes in historically underserved and under-resourced communities like the 55th Assembly district, including the UNNC communities, and across the State.
- Silence the voices of underserved communities that have been historically burdened with top-down zoning rules by removing all of the community's existing rights provided by standard processes and replacing those rights solely with ministerial review and approval,
- Undermine Los Angeles' State approved climate, transportation, and housing commitments by requiring increased density without review of impacts on the environment and public health. The State approved commitments already identify the geographic areas for State mandated new housing which are mostly along transit and commercial corridors, and
- Allow, through density bonuses, structures as tall as 105' (approximately 10.5 stories). Some of the most densely populated areas within the UNNC boundary, including Jefferson Park and parts of its Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), are within a half mile of a major rail stop. With more than 2,000 structures, the Jefferson Park HPOZ is the second largest community in the city with such a designation. Thus, any property in those neighborhoods, including the middle of multi- or single family residential, industrial or commercial block, will be available for SB79 development.

SB79 should be stopped before it:

1. Eliminates local control of land use;
2. Obstructs the City's ability to meet its housing commitment in the Los Angeles State certified Housing Element, including affordable housing goals, while simultaneously imposing an unfunded mandate of billions of dollars on our communities that can ill afford such costs;
3. Wastes millions of dollars and valuable resources already expended by Planning Departments across the State in creating the Housing Elements that comply with State and Federal standards. The Housing Elements already accomplish the goal of creating needed housing in a sensitive and sensible way, which SB79 does not do.

[9] Ibid.

4. Ignores and results in the loss of the careful planning that created historic zones and specific and community plans; and
5. Destroys thriving communities and neighborhoods in LA.

SB79 could be modified to improve neighborhoods by including the following critical changes:

1. ***Infrastructure***: The Bill should include funding for infrastructure costs resulting from construction and increased density. Such funding should, at a minimum, cover the estimated costs of additional infrastructure and public safety, such as, increase in first responders, and address damage to streets from construction vehicles, etc., which will likely occur since such streets were not intended to support heavy building equipment.

2. ***Reliance on Dedicated Bus Lanes***: Remove dedicated bus lane stops as a radial landmark for calculating the circle of inclusion of neighborhoods subject to implementation of the Bill. We ask for the removal of such bus stops as part of the bill because dedicated bus lanes can be transitory, that is, they can be implemented for a time, later moved, and bus lanes can be removed. For example, Los Angeles is considering creating dedicated bus lanes in anticipation of the 2028 Olympics, but it is reported that there is no plan at this point to make them permanent.[10] The transitory nature of the bus lanes and their stops could result in:

    a. Residents of high density areas could be left without access to the transportation that the development was predicated on if the bus stop or bus lane is removed.

    b. An abusive use of the law, where a bus lane is installed in order to open up a section of the City for development. Once developed the bus lane is removed leaving the residents without access to the transportation the development was predicated on.

3. ***Historic Cultural Preservation***: Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZ), Historic Cultural Monuments (HCM), and other duly designated historic properties should be exempt from SB79. Such Zones and properties represent the historic cultural history of our communities. Please DON'T erase the historic cultural heritage and inheritance of our communities as is being done at the federal level.

[10] Jamie Ferrell, *4 Biggest L.A. Transportation Projects Being Built for The Olympics—LAX People Mover, D Line Extension, And More*, Secret Los Angeles; May 13, 2025 (accessed July 29, 2025).

4. ***Address Environmental Degradation & Quality of Life***:

   a. High population density has been scientifically linked to higher mortality rates, a range of cancers, pulmonary and heart disease and other diseases.[11] SB79 will increase population density in dense geographic urban areas like South Los Angeles.

      South Los Angeles already suffers from high population density and inequity in open green space and public parks compared with other parts of the City. Please note that Jefferson Park, within the UNNC boundary, is "*among the highest [population] densities for the city of Los Angeles and among the highest densities for the county*."[12] Yet, our community is park-poor and has only a 15% tree canopy, far below the citywide average of 25%. UNNC and specifically Jefferson Park are in the bottom quartile and is designated "Very High Priority" in the Trust for Public Land's Park Serve tool, which characterizes the general area surrounding Crenshaw and Exposition (the very same local geography targeted in SB79) as a "Very High Priority" for park needs.[13] In an even broader overview, the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Park Community Plan, which already provides for intense development near major transit, states that ***the community plan area has a 1,755-acre park/open-space deficit***.[14] The high-density projects promoted by SB 79 tend to eliminate any open space that would be available to plant trees and provide parks.

      Public parks promote outdoor physical activities and are critical to increased public health. Research links access to urban parks to decreases in the risk of childhood obesity, heart disease, depression, anxiety, and some common cancers as well as critical increases to bone and muscle health.[15, 16]

      Since SB79 requires increases in population density that should trigger a concomitant increase in the number of neighborhood parks to address the community's health and quality of life, particularly in geographic areas like South Los Angeles that historically have few parks. Additionally, SB79 should NOT direct local governments to waive local rules that

[11] Elaine Ruth Carnegie, et.al., *Is Population Density Associated with Non-Communicable Disease in Western Developed Countries? A Systematic Review*, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2022 Feb 24; 19(5) 2638 (accessed June 5, 2025).
[12] Los Angeles Times, *Mapping LA, South LA, Jefferson Park*, (accessed June 5, 2025).
[13] Trust for Public Land, *The ParkServe Database* (accessed July 29, 2025).
[14] Los Angeles City Planning, *West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Park Community Plan, Parkland Needs in the West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Community Plan*: June 2016, 5-24 (accessed July 30, 2025).
[15] Jennifer Wolch, et.al., *Childhood obesity and proximity to urban parks and recreational resources: A longitudinal cohort study*; Health & Place, v17, n1 January 2011 (accessed June 5, 2025).
[16] Centers for Disease Control, *Benefits of Physical Activity*, April 24, 2024 (accessed June 5, 2025).

require developments to include open spaces, that is, new SB 79 buildings should retain the local requirements, such as those provided in the Los Angeles Municipal Code[17].

b. SB79 and similar initiatives in the community should require developers to substantially increase the tree canopy in order to offset the environmental degradation and damage to public health through increased construction and population density.

SB79 will result in unchecked construction that displaces hardworking people from their homes and apartments. In the process, it will drastically increase our taxes and other costs to support augmented infrastructure, erase the cultural history of our communities, negatively impact our health, and decrease our quality of life, purely for the benefit of investors exploiting the situation for their own profit without addressing our real need for affordable housing as well as housing and resources for the homeless. We need affordable housing. SB 79 ignores that need in favor of market-rate apartments that will only push housing costs up.

Please vote against SB79's negative impact on our residential communities and its undermining of the Los Angeles Housing Element, and please encourage your colleagues to do likewise.

Sincerely,

Paula Southern

Paula Southern
President, UNNC
president@unnc.org

Encl: Letter from City Attorney Hydee Feldstein-Soto to State Senator Anna Caballero, *SB 79 (Wiener) – OPPOSE Unless Amended*, May 23, 2025.

cc: Scott Weiner, Senator, California Senate District 11
Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Los Angeles City Council President (Council District 8)
Heather Hutt, Councilperson, Los Angeles City Council District 10
Caleb Rabinowitz, Chief of Staff, Assembly District 55
Joanne Kim, Chief of Staff, Council District 8

[17] Los Angeles Municipal Code, *Planning and Zoning, General Provisions §12.21* (accessed July 29, 2025),

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