



**COUNTY OF
SAN BERNARDINO**
**COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICE**

LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
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GREGORY C. DEVEREAUX
Chief Executive Officer

April 18, 2011

The Honorable Paul Cook
California State Assembly
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: **AB 1209 (Cook)** – As Amended April 4, 2011 – **SUPPORT**

The County of San Bernardino is pleased to support AB 1209. This legislation would appropriate the sum of \$7,300,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for specified veterans' services. Furthermore, AB 1209 would ensure that County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) regain what was lost when the funding for Operation Welcome Home was eliminated.

CVSOs statewide receive \$2.6 million from the California Department of Veterans Affairs. This amount compared to the \$23 million total cost to counties related to maintaining these programs illustrates how the state has not kept pace with increasing costs. San Bernardino County's annual subvention from the State is \$299,000. SB 419, which was chaptered in 2009, provides code cleanup by declaring that 50% of the amount annually budgeted for county veteran service officers is approximately \$11 million. While this bill recognizes the increase in costs to counties there was no appropriation included in the bill requiring the state to increase funding to CVSOs.

As you know, CVSOs provide outreach and advocacy to veterans throughout California. With offices in 54 of California's 58 counties, and employing over 250 local government employees, CVSOs represent a significant resource to our veteran community. This significant human resource represents a highly effective and low-cost solution to the challenges of service delivery to California's large veteran community. Because CVSOs are located in communities statewide, they are often the initial point of local contact for claimants accessing the VA benefit system.

In San Bernardino County alone, with a land area of approximately 18,000 square miles, our veteran service offices have seen a 58% increase in walk-in clients from 12,100 in 2004 to more than 20,600 in 2010. Telephone contacts for the same period have increased 47% from 30,000 to 44,500. The CVSOs staff's caseloads have also increased on average of 44% from 330 to 750 in just five years.

The services these offices provide are essential to the veteran population in our County due to the fact that there is no state or federal VA staff to serve our veterans and their families. Increasing funding for county veteran service offices will ensure that local agencies have the financial resources to continue to provide services to veterans efficiently and effectively.

The mission of the government of the County of San Bernardino is to satisfy its customers by providing service that promotes the health, safety, well being, and quality of life of its residents according to the County Charter, general laws, and the will of the people it serves.

The Honorable Paul Cook

April 18, 2011

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For these reasons, the County of San Bernardino supports AB 1209. If you have any questions, please contact Josh Candelaria, Deputy Legislative Director at (909) 387-4280. The County thanks you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josie Gonzales". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and a small arrow pointing to the right at the end.

JOSIE GONZALES

Chair

San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors