



COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT

Established in 1918 as a public agency

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Jim Barrett

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CLERK OF THE BOARD
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ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER
Dan Charlton

July 30, 2025

The Honorable María Elena Durazo
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 7530
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Senate Bill 707 — Open meetings: meeting and teleconference requirements —
Notice of Opposition (As Amended July 17, 2025)**

Dear Senator Durazo:

On behalf of Coachella Valley Water District, I write in respectful opposition to Senate Bill (SB) 707. While we share and appreciate the intent to expand transparency and encourage public participation in local government, we have concerns that several provisions in the bill may result in unintended operational and fiscal challenges for local agencies. We respectfully offer the following input based on the real-world impacts we anticipate and our direct, on-the-ground experience administering public meetings.

Remote Participation Requirements

SB 707 mandates real-time remote public comment via two-way telephonic or audiovisual platforms for all meetings of “eligible legislative bodies.” While we recognize the importance of expanding access, this requirement may significantly increase staffing demands, overtime, technology infrastructure, and security needs. Managing virtual participation can also present challenges such as inappropriate content and meeting disruption, which require additional oversight and planning. Moreover, if a technology disruption occurs that is within the agency’s control, the bill currently requires the meeting to pause until the issue is resolved. This could halt critical and time-sensitive work unnecessarily, even if a quorum is physically present and ready to proceed. Special meetings held at alternative locations, often organized to better serve community needs, could be especially challenging to support due to these technology requirements. This may discourage local agencies from holding such beneficial meetings. As a result, some agencies may be forced to reduce the number of meetings they can support, ultimately limiting public engagement rather than enhancing it.

Agenda Translation Requirements

The bill's language translation requirements also present implementation questions. SB 707 requires agendas to be translated into all "applicable languages," defined as those spoken by 20% or more of the local population with limited English proficiency. This could require the translation of materials that may never be requested or used, resulting in significant costs and administrative burden, and diverting resources from other critical needs within the agency. A request-based model, similar to other public records and accessibility accommodations, would more effectively balance accessibility with feasibility.

Additionally, Section 54953.4 would require agencies to create and maintain translated versions of a public-facing webpage, with prominent links on the homepage for each applicable language. While we support greater language access, this could pose practical challenges, especially for agencies with limited homepage space already used for mandated notices and critical community updates. Managing multiple translated webpages also requires technical capacity that many smaller agencies may not have.

Many users already rely on browser-based translation tools to navigate agency websites effectively. As an alternative, we respectfully suggest allowing for a centralized translation landing page, enhanced compatibility with translation tools, or a request-based approach to help balance accessibility goals with feasibility.

Special District Considerations

For special districts, the challenge is even more complex. Given the unique and often non-contiguous boundaries of special districts, there is significant uncertainty around which jurisdiction(s) should be used to determine the applicable languages. Without clarification, districts may struggle to identify which population data to rely on and how to implement the mandate consistently.

Public-Submitted Translations

We also seek clarification on the provision allowing the public to post their own translations of agendas. While we understand that agencies would not be held liable for inaccurate postings, this could lead to potential confusion or dissemination of inaccurate information. Despite the language in the bill to technically alleviate liability by local agencies, these mandated posting locations will be viewed by the general public as officially sanctioned postings. This will lead to significant unfounded criticisms of local agencies and erosion of public trust if any problems arise from third-party translations. In addition, many agencies lack the physical posting space to accommodate multiple versions, and building new infrastructure would carry additional costs.

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Advisory Body Recommendations

The bill's requirements concerning advisory body recommendations may be interpreted broadly and could interfere with existing legislative workflows. For example, requiring the governing body to discuss all advisory recommendations—regardless of relevance or scope—could reduce flexibility, create procedural inefficiencies, and raise questions about the proper scope of advisory bodies' authority. In practice, many advisory bodies make recommendations in real time and within a timeframe that aligns with the issue at hand; waiting for an annual report or other delayed mechanism would not be practical and could undermine the purpose of the recommendation.

Implementation Timeline

Finally, SB 707 is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2026, providing agencies with only a few months to implement significant operational changes. This may not be feasible for many jurisdictions, especially smaller or under-resourced ones. If the bill proceeds, we respectfully request that the implementation date be delayed to January 1, 2027, to allow adequate time for thoughtful planning, budgeting, and compliance.

Closing

We remain committed to the goals of transparency and public engagement and hope to continue working collaboratively toward practical, effective improvements to public meeting processes. However, for the reasons outlined above, Coachella Valley Water District must respectfully oppose SB 707 in its current form. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further input or offer suggestions that balance the real-world impacts on local agencies while supporting the bill's intent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.M. Barrett", written over a blue wavy line that spans the width of the page.

J.M. Barrett
General Manager

cc: Members and Staff of the Assembly Appropriations Committee
Brady Borchering, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom