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March 26, 2008

Assemblyman Mark Leno
State Capitol Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814
Fax: 916-319-2113

Re: Statement of Support for AB 2986

Dear Assemblyman Leno,

I am writing on behalf of the Monterey Coastkeeper, a non-profit organization that aims to protect the water, watersheds and coastal waters within the vicinity of the Monterey Bay. The Monterey Coastkeeper urges you to support AB 2986. The bill will require much needed transparency regarding the conduct of sanitary operations, specifically concerning sewer infrastructure and the risk of sewage spills. The proper management of sanitary waste is of the utmost importance to the health of California's waters and ocean.

Although sewage is not a glamorous political topic, legislation requiring proper management of sanitary programs is integral to the health of California's people and environment! Thanks to under investment in infrastructure and minimal oversight of the system, sewage frequently makes it into our water supply. Sewage spills, overflows into storm drain systems and surface waters are problems that municipalities must address frequently. In our area, Pacific Grove frequently experiences overflows that discharge either into the storm water system or into the ocean directly.

Sewage carries a multitude of bacteria, chemical toxins, hormones, and disease causing microorganisms. When people – and wildlife -- come in contact with sewage because of system malfunctions such as back ups into streets or homes they can become ill. Of additional concern, people can come in contact with these health threatening agents when using public waterways for wading, swimming, fishing, surfing, or other recreational purposes. Along the coast, sewage overflows can lead to high levels of coliform bacteria--an indicator organism that signals contaminated water. When this occurs, beaches are closed to avert the risk to human health that impaired waters pose. The California coastline provides innumerable services to Californians and the millions of tourists that flock to its shores every year. Beach closures and poor water quality not only detract from this experience, but pose a risk to local economies. The



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary notes that tourism is the second largest industry in Central California and that "an image of closed or contaminated beaches could be a multi-million dollar threat to the local economy."¹

The Monterey Coastkeeper is concerned about the threat that improperly treated sewage poses to human and non-human users of water. AB 2986 would provide some solution to the problem by allowing Californians to evaluate their sanitary system. First of all, the proposed grading system would make the information needed to recognize problems with the waste management system available to the public in an easily understood format. If the public knows that certain parts of the sanitary infrastructure were failing, and recognizes the immediate threats that the failure poses, public bodies are more likely to be held accountable for these failures, and encouraged to find solutions. Public awareness makes a difference! The Monterey Coastkeeper is in strong support of information transparency and the use of the public process.

Secondly, the bill's requirement that Flow Meters that identify tributaries with excessive flow rates be installed would help identify areas where spills are likely due to weak pipes or inadequate structural capacity. Access to data allows for more informed decision makers on the part of all involved.

In conclusion, we at the Monterey Coastkeeper believe that AB 2986 will provide Californians with the tools necessary to address the issue of sanitary infrastructure deficiencies, thereby eliminating raw sewage spills. We strongly support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Allison Ford
Program Associate

¹ MBNMS Resource Management Issues: Beach Closures;
<http://montereybay.noaa.gov/resourcepro/resmanissues/beach.html>