



April 15, 2024

To: ABAG Executive Board
Subject: BAHFA Affordable Housing Bond Ballot

Dear President Ramos and ABAG Executive Board Members,

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area (LWVBA) is an inter-League organization with an elected board representing the 20 local Leagues and county councils within the 9-county Bay Area. We believe in the value of regional government and are committed to increasing understanding of its role in solving the many challenges facing the San Francisco Bay Area. We supported the CASA Compact in 2018 as a first step in increasing affordable housing production, preservation and protection. The LWVBA board requested and received state League support for BAHFA's enabling legislation. Our two educational forums on the BAHFA affordable housing bond measure featuring Director Kate Hartley generated much interest and discussion and we are grateful for her participation.

LWVBA supports the BAHFA bond measure "in concept" and commends MTC and ABAG members and staff for the work done to date. However, **we are delaying the decision on whether to support, oppose or remain neutral on the final ballot measure.** We are concerned that there has been no robust discussion regarding an independent, citizens' oversight committee. It appears that the only oversight mentioned in the many BAHFA documents describes the minimum required of all general obligation bonds. Members of the League of Women Voters at all levels – local, regional, state and national – are committed to meaningful civic engagement and public participation. The quality and scope of such oversight must be a factor in our decision making.

The polling overview presented by EMC's Ruth Bernstein to the Housing Committees reinforced LWVBA's view that the BAHFA bond measure cannot reach the threshold of 55% if voters feel there is insufficient oversight of the largest affordable housing bond in state history. Since Santa Clara County is the largest in our region representing approximately 23% of the its voters, we cite the "Measure A Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee" as a successful model. While we do not want to be overly prescriptive at this point, we respectfully highlight a few reasons why a recent Grand Jury reported on it so favorably:

- A scope of work with access to the independent auditor with the ability to request spot audits. (Committee members participated in the selection of the independent auditor.)
- Quarterly meetings and reports utilizing key performance indicators that compared current progress to goals expressed in getting the bond measure passed.
- A broad based committee consisting of stakeholders with relevant skills and expertise. In particular, we believe committee members should be representatives of regionally recognized groups including auditors and affordable housing experts.

- Adequate staffing and the ability to rely on external consultants to create its reports and data analytics.
- A website dedicated to the committee's work.

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area is pleased to see the development of the BAHFA Business Plan, Regional Expenditure Plan and most especially the Equity Framework. We applaud the innovation they represent and urge you to commit to an effective independent citizens' oversight committee so this generational opportunity is not lost.

Regards,



Kathleen Cha, League of Women Voters of the Bay Area President



Roma Dawson, League of Women Voters of the Bay Area Housing Director

cc: Andrew Fremier, MTC/ABAG Executive Director
Kate Hartley, BAHFA Director
BAHFA Oversight Committee
BAHFA Board