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March 17, 2026

TO: Rio Dell City Council

FROM: Kyle Knopp, City Manager

SUBJECT: Discussion and Possible Action to Authorize the Mayor Execute Correspondence in Support of AB 1866 related to the California Disaster Assistance Act.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL:

Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached correspondence; or,

Take no action.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

AB 1866, introduced by Assemblymember Chris Rogers (D-Santa Rosa) on February 17, 2026, would amend the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) to require the Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to prioritize local agencies that are not eligible for federal disaster assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act when allocating state public assistance funds. The bill is sponsored by the League of California Cities.

This legislation directly addresses a gap in the disaster assistance framework that disadvantaged Rio Dell following the December 2022 Ferndale Earthquake. Staff recommends the City Council authorize a formal letter of support.

The CDAA (Government Code §§8680–8692) requires the CalOES Director to provide financial assistance to local agencies for personnel costs, equipment costs, and the cost of supplies and materials used during disaster response activities arising from a Governor-proclaimed state of emergency. The CDAA also provides funding for repair, restoration, or replacement of public facilities damaged by disaster.

Under existing law, the CalOES Director has broad discretion in allocating CDAA funds but is not currently required to give priority to agencies that are ineligible for federal assistance.

Federal public assistance under the Stafford Act becomes available to California only when statewide damages exceed a FEMA-established per-capita threshold. Because California is the most populous state in the nation, this threshold is exceptionally high — currently requiring more than \$72 million in statewide damages before federal aid can be unlocked.

This structure creates a significant inequity: a community can suffer catastrophic local damage, yet remain ineligible for federal assistance if the statewide total falls short of FEMA's threshold. The threshold is calculated based on statewide aggregate damages, not local impact, meaning that rural and

low-income communities with lower property values are systematically disadvantaged compared to wealthier urban areas where a far smaller number of damaged properties can produce equivalent dollar figures.

On December 20, 2022, Rio Dell was struck by a 6.4 magnitude earthquake (the 2022 Ferndale Earthquake) and a series of significant aftershocks. Ground sensor data recorded peak ground acceleration of 1.4g in Rio Dell — the third highest level ever measured in a California earthquake.

The impacts to Rio Dell were severe:

Impact Category	Detail
<b>Homes Damaged</b>	Approximately 1 in 4 residential structures
<b>Residents Displaced</b>	Approximately 300
<b>Water Service</b>	Temporarily interrupted city-wide
<b>Estimated Local Damages</b>	~\$32 million
<b>Peak Ground Acceleration</b>	1.4g (3rd highest ever recorded in CA)
<b>Federal Disaster Declaration</b>	Not issued (statewide threshold not met)

Despite these impacts, the statewide damage total from the 2022 event did not reach the federal threshold, and no federal major disaster declaration was issued for public assistance purposes. The limited federal involvement was confined to SBA disaster loan programs and USDA assistance — programs that, while helpful to individual applicants, do not provide the comprehensive public infrastructure and facility recovery support that a federal disaster declaration would have unlocked for the City.

Rio Dell is a severely economically disadvantaged community. According to the 2021 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau), median household income in Rio Dell is \$36,648, compared to \$54,752 for Humboldt County and \$84,907 for California statewide. The City has an extremely limited general fund and cannot absorb substantial uncompensated disaster recovery costs without corresponding impacts to essential municipal services.

Under the CDAA, Rio Dell qualifies for a 75% state cost share for eligible expenses, and potentially 100% coverage as an AB 2140-compliant jurisdiction (meaning the City has adopted a state-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan as part of its General Plan Safety Element). However, full reimbursement is not guaranteed, creating significant budget uncertainty during multi-year recovery efforts.

AB 1866 would add Section 8685.1 to the Government Code to require that, when the CalOES Director determines the allocation of CDAA funds for a project, the Director shall prioritize local agencies that are not eligible for assistance under the federal Stafford Act due to their inability to meet FEMA’s minimum damage threshold.

The bill would also add a provision allowing volunteer hours to count toward matching requirements under the CDAA, reducing the financial burden on local jurisdictions during recovery.

The bill does not appropriate new funds. It directs how existing CDAA funds are to be prioritized, ensuring that communities that have no federal recourse are not disadvantaged relative to those that will receive federal assistance.

Staff finds that AB 1866 addresses a documented and material gap in California’s disaster assistance framework that directly impacted Rio Dell following the 2022 Ferndale Earthquake. The bill’s prioritization provision is a targeted, narrowly drawn clarification that would improve equity in the distribution of existing state resources without requiring additional appropriations.

The bill is consistent with the City’s ongoing recovery interests and with the policy positions of the League of California Cities, which has sponsored the legislation. Assemblymember Rogers’ district encompasses Rio Dell, and his office has engaged City leadership directly in the development of this bill.

Staff is not aware of any provisions of AB 1866 that would conflict with City interests or create adverse fiscal impacts to the City. The bill's passage would benefit not only Rio Dell but any California community that experiences a significant local disaster that nonetheless falls short of FEMA's statewide threshold — a scenario that will recur as long as the current federal threshold structure remains in place.

Attachments:

Letter in support of AB 1866

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