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March 17, 2026

The Honorable Chris Rogers  
Member, California State Assembly  
1021 O Street, Suite 5130  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 1866 (Rogers) California Disaster Assistance Act.  
Notice of SUPPORT (As Introduced on February 17, 2026)**

Dear Assemblymember Rogers,

The City of Rio Dell is pleased to support AB 1866 (Rogers), which would strengthen the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) by ensuring local agencies that do not qualify for federal disaster aid are prioritized when being considered for state disaster public assistance following a state-declared emergency.

Under current law, the CDAA requires the Director of California's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) 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 state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor. While federal disaster assistance is also an important component of recovery, access to that funding is constrained by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) minimum per-event damage threshold, which currently requires more than \$72 million in statewide damages for California disasters to qualify for federal aid.

Because this threshold is based on statewide damages, communities that experience significant local impacts may still be ineligible for federal assistance if the overall event does not meet the federal minimum. Smaller, rural, and economically disadvantaged communities are particularly vulnerable under this structure, as they often lack the fiscal capacity to absorb unexpected recovery costs for damaged public facilities and infrastructure.

AB 1866 would clarify that, when allocating state public assistance funding under the CDAA, the CalOES Director should prioritize local agencies that are not eligible for federal assistance due to their inability to meet FEMA's minimum damage threshold. This change would help ensure more equitable access to

state disaster funding and provide critical support to communities working to rebuild without federal assistance.

For cities like ours, this prioritization would help protect local budgets, preserve essential services, and support timely recovery following a disaster event that does not meet the federal minimum damage threshold.

On December 20, 2022, Rio Dell was struck by a 6.4 magnitude earthquake and a series of aftershocks known as the 2022 Ferndale Earthquake. Ground sensor data shows that the ground acceleration reached 1.4g in Rio Dell—the third highest level ever recorded during a California earthquake. The damage was severe, impacting one out of every four homes, temporarily interrupting water services, and displacing approximately 300 residents. Estimated damages to Rio Dell alone totaled approximately \$32 million, far short of the federal threshold, and the event was therefore not escalated to a federal disaster declaration despite its immense local impact. Federal involvement was limited to programs administered by the Small Business Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture—programs that, while helpful, are not substitutes for the comprehensive infrastructure and public facility recovery support that a federal disaster declaration would have unlocked. This gap in federal assistance is a significant and recurring problem for communities across California.

Rio Dell is a severely economically disadvantaged community. According to the 2021 American Community Survey, median household income in Rio Dell is \$36,648, compared to \$54,752 for Humboldt County and \$84,907 for California overall. Under the CDAA, Rio Dell is eligible for a 75 percent cost share with the state, and potentially 100 percent coverage as an AB 2140-compliant jurisdiction (meaning the City has adopted a state-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan)—though full reimbursement is not guaranteed. This uncertainty creates significant difficulty in planning and executing recovery projects, particularly for a community with such limited fiscal capacity.

Rio Dell's experience illustrates precisely why AB 1866 is needed. By directing state assistance to communities that fall through the cracks of the federal threshold, the bill strengthens the equity and resilience of California's disaster response system. For these reasons, the City of Rio Dell is pleased to support AB 1866 (Rogers).

Sincerely,

Debra Garnes  
Mayor  
City of Rio Dell

CC:

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Senator Mike McGuire  
Assembly Member Jessica Caloza  
Humboldt Cty. Board of Supervisors  
Humboldt County Mayors  
Director Nancy Ward, CalOES  
Sara Sanders, CalCities