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The Honorable David Alvarez
California State Assembly District 80
1021 O St., Ste. 5320
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2560 (Alvarez) Density Bonus Law: California Coastal Act of 1976 – Feedback letter

Dear Senator Alvarez,

As a Marin County Supervisor representing District 4, which includes the vast majority of the County's Coastal Zone, I write to provide feedback on AB 2560 and its potential implications for critical Coastal Zone protections in California. However, since in its current form, the bill would be largely inapplicable in Marin County – this letter does not represent a support or oppose position on the legislation at this time, but rather general feedback.

Every county within California's 840-mile Coastal Zone has unique geography, economies, and development. Marin County's Coastal Zone is characterized by large, protected federal and state parklands; longstanding agriculture and dairy; and small towns that support a substantial tourist economy, and a small number of year-round residents – including those who serve the region's tourism and agricultural industries.

Like other northern California counties, Marin owes much of the longstanding protection of its coastal areas from large-scale development to the 1972 Coastal Act, passed by California voters alarmed that unchecked industrial and luxury residential development was steadily cutting off public access to the shore. The Coastal Act and the Coastal Commission are the reasons that California's coast remains open to all Californians rather than being dominated by high-end hotels and developments (as seen in New Jersey and South Florida), and why much of Northern California's Coast remains protected from the oceanfront residential and commercial development prevalent in Southern California.

Given its critical importance, any changes to the Coastal Act, including exemptions and new restrictions to the current authority of the Coastal Commission, should be reviewed by policymakers very carefully to ensure their benefits outweigh any potential for unintended consequences, including the kind of unaffordable development the original Coastal Act sought to prevent.

AB 2560's intent is to create more affordable housing on the Coast, which we know that California needs. Working class residents, older adults, and other vulnerable groups are in danger of losing the very limited Naturally Occurring Affordable

Housing (NOAH) remaining on the coast – and new affordable housing is infrequent. In a remote coastal zone like Marin’s – that means many workers commute long distances for the low-wage service sector and agricultural jobs the area needs.

However, it is not clear that AB 2560 offers the prescription California’s Coastal Zone needs to resolve its affordable housing crisis. It is possible that the bill’s density bonus exemption may actually make current NOAH properties more appealing to developers to purchase and redevelop – resulting in an actual net loss of current affordable housing for a smaller number of deed-restricted units, and more high-end condominiums. Additionally, the additional units and rental income the law would enable may drive up property values – displacing current vulnerable residents even further.

While there are also opportunities where AB 2560 could streamline the development of affordable housing in laudable projects – it is clear that it is not the only way to preserve and create more affordable housing in the state’s Coastal Zone.

I urge you to consider this feedback regarding the possibility of unintended consequences, and also the critical importance of the Coastal Act in protecting California’s coastline for public access guarantees, low-cost recreational opportunities, wetlands, sensitive habitats, and the biological productivity of ocean waters. While there is no doubt that Coastal regions, including Marin, need affordable housing: it is crucial that policymakers consider all possible implications of creating new exemptions to the Coastal Act which has successfully protected our coastline for more than 50 years.

Sincerely,



Dennis Rodoni
Marin County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Chair and members, Senate Housing Committee
Chair and members, Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee