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November 8, 2024

Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization
c/o Los Angeles County Office of Education
9300 Imperial Highway
Downey, California 90242-2890

Re: City of Malibu's Petition to Separate from Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District

Dear Committee Members:

As the Assemblymember for the 51st Assembly District, I represent the vast majority of the students educated in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD). I have recently been made aware of the upcoming hearings regarding the City of Malibu's request that its 2017 unification petition be revisited. I believe these hearings are premature given the current status of negotiations between the City of Malibu and SMMUSD. With that in mind, it is my view that the County Committee should facilitate the parties' return to a process that appears to be close to final.

It is my understanding that the City of Malibu's 2017 petition failed to meet the majority of the criteria to which it was subject under state law. This failure led to a good faith mediation process that aimed to identify a path to a fair and equitable separation that would not harm the approximately 8,700 students who are served by the current school district.

Additionally, I understand that SMMUSD has been working with the City of Malibu to collaboratively complete a set of agreements that protect the needs of both a future "SMUSD" and a future "MUSD." This is, by all measures, an arduous process that requires patience, goodwill, and cooperation from both sides.

The final agreements will forever alter SMMUSD and fundamentally shape the ability of *both* the separate districts to educate the children who attend public schools in Santa Monica and Malibu. This process should not be unduly rushed, and again, I would counsel patience. It is crucial for the County Committee to take into consideration that this is the *first* time a basic aid district will have separated, and, as far as I am aware, there is no precedent for this in the State of California.

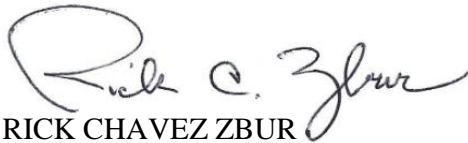
Furthermore, from all reports I have seen, the agreements between SMMUSD and the City of Malibu are almost complete. While it would certainly be ideal for the agreements to have already been finalized, it is not shocking that a process this complex and consequential would take longer than might have been originally expected or intended. Accordingly, while frustration at the timeline is understandable, the answer to this frustration is to *continue* working collaboratively, and to build upon, rather than reject, the countless hours of work that have been put into this process by all parties.

Finally, SMMUSD has made clear that it needs adequate time to evaluate data from the County; it is objectively necessary that SMMUSD use this data to stress test and validate the methodology that underlies the integrated agreements. In the same vein, SMMUSD has an obligation to ensure that it has responded to the concerns of its constituents. My understanding is that the School Board has been making a reasonable and timely effort to achieve both these ends. Again, the process has been slower than hoped, but substantial progress has clearly been made.

In closing, I would like to once again reiterate that we are dealing with an unprecedented situation, and the education of thousands of children is at stake. It appears that final agreements meeting the goals of both the City of Malibu and SMMUSD are almost complete, and while frustration may certainly be understandable, the parties must exercise patience.

For the reasons above, I ask that the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization reject this petition and facilitate a return to the mediation process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rick C. Zbur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rick" being the most prominent.

RICK CHAVEZ ZBUR
Assemblymember, 51st District
Democratic Caucus Chair