



# City of Watsonville

*"A Community of Opportunities"*

January 21, 2022

The Honorable John Laird California State Senate  
1021 O Street Sacramento, CA 95814  
Re: SB 418 (Laird): Pajaro Valley Healthcare District

Dear Senator Laird:

On behalf of the City of Watsonville City Council, we write in support of your Senate Bill 418, a measure that establishes the Pajaro Valley Healthcare District in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties. SB 418 is urgently needed to address an imminent closure of the Watsonville Community Hospital and to ensure that the hospital remains open and accessible to our community.

Watsonville Community Hospital is a 106-bed hospital, employs 620 people, and has a medical staff of over two hundred physicians. It provides a range of quality medical services, including an emergency room, OB-GYN, pediatrics, medical surgical care, wound care, gastroenterology, orthopedics, cardiovascular disease, dermatology and more. In 2020, the hospital delivered more babies than any other in the county. Serving a significant immigrant population, the hospital provides care to those without English language proficiency in their preferred language. Nearly 50% of the hospital's patients are on MediCal.

The community of Watsonville has historically faced many health and economic disparities. The pandemic resulted in the loss of employment, school closures, and caused non-essential workers and at-risk populations to stay home. Overcrowded and substandard housing conditions, food insecurity, lack of transportation, and high cost of housing intensified disparities overnight. The Pajaro Valley saw – and continues to see – dramatic and disproportionate rates of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and death as compared to the rest of Santa Cruz County.

Watsonville Community Hospital has been essential in serving its community's primarily low-income, under and uninsured populations of color for over a century and proved crucial in serving those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 throughout the pandemic.

The Watsonville Community Hospital is the primary medical facility for our community. The nearest full-service hospital is Dominican in Santa Cruz and is about 20 minutes away, depending on gridlocked traffic. Dominican is already so heavily impacted and adding to that burden would only significantly reduce their capacity to assist patients. In addition, added time for an ambulance stuck in traffic can be the difference between life and death. We do not know how long we will be fighting COVID-19, nor can

we predict when the next crisis will strike. What we do know is that closing the Watsonville Community Hospital could result in lost lives.

SB 418 lays out the boundaries of the district, makes clear that the new district will be subject to the oversight of the Santa Cruz and Monterey County Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs), and directs the initial district board of directors to establish zones for the eventual election of future directors. Additionally, the new Pajaro Valley Healthcare District would be subject to all of the requirements and authorities of other California healthcare districts, as contained in Health and Safety Code Section 32000.

The urgent formation of the healthcare district, as outlined in SB 418, is necessary to ensure that the hospital remains open and is under the stewardship of a public entity. We are grateful for your support of this effort.

Sincerely,



Mayor Ari Parker

On behalf of the City of Watsonville City Council

cc: The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Chair, Assembly Local Government Committee  
Members and Consultants, Assembly Local Government Committee  
The Honorable John Laird, California State Senate  
The Honorable Anna Caballero, California State Senate  
The Honorable Robert Rivas, California State Assembly  
The Honorable Mark Stone, California State Assembly