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March 30, 2017

By electronic mail

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Education Committee
1020 N Street, Room 159
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: AB 261 (Thurmond) – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member O'Donnell:

Public Advocates supports AB 261 (Thurmond), to require that the student member of a school district governing board have preferential voting rights.

Public Advocates is a civil rights legal organization that has served as a key voice for educational equity in landmark cases such as *Serrano v. Priest* and *Williams v. California*. Our commitment to “making rights real” has shaped our vision of building an educational system that provides meaningful opportunities to learn so that *all* students are prepared for college *and* careers and student voice is strengthened so students are empowered to be leaders in their communities.

Student positions on the governing board of school districts are a critical opportunity for pupils to engage in their community and provide valuable input that directly affects their education. Existing law allows local school boards to provide preferential voting rights to student board members. Requiring preferential voting rights will contribute to students’ greater engagement in board decision-making and building a culture of relationship-centered schools. According to the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), ensuring college and career readiness is deeply connected with students’ academic experiences and levels of engagement early on in schools. The LPI reports that schools that emphasize hands-on learning and social-emotional skills promotes continuous improvement and produces deeper learning outcomes.

Preferential voting rights means that student board members’ input will be formally recorded in the minutes and cast before the official votes of the governing board members. By enhancing student voice in school decision-making processes, AB 261 promotes strong collaboration between students and educators, improves parent and community involvement, and supports policies that directly serve students. It is

more important than ever to encourage student engagement and ensure strong representation of student voice in district policymaking.

For these reasons, Public Advocates supports AB 261. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Guillen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Liz Guillen
Director of Legislative & Community Affairs
(916) 803-5596 – cell

Cc: Assembly Education Committee
Assembly Member Tony Thurmond