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*Santa Ynez
Valley Alliance*

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RE: Opposition to SB 162

Dear Senators Anderson, Wyman and Assembly Member Garrick,

The Santa Ynez Valley Alliance is writing to express its opposition to SB 162. This bill would prohibit State agencies from opposing Indian tribes' attempts to add private property to their sovereign reservations for purposes such as housing, environmental protection or cultural preservation.

In the Santa Ynez Valley that would mean State officials would be prevented from voicing any disagreement with the proposed application by an extremely wealthy tribe, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, to use the federal fee-to-trust process to annex 1,400 acres known as "Camp 4" to their reservation. Counties rely on the State to provide comments on fee-to-trust land acquisition applications on behalf of the State as a whole and also the affected local communities. Therefore, we oppose any attempt to limit the State in this capacity.

There are significant other reasons for not moving ahead with this legislation. SB 162 is not fiscally conservative. Although SB 162 purports to save State funds it will directly and practically affect the personal pocket books of individual citizens who suffer the greatest negative impacts from fee-to-trust land acquisitions and who are left with no recourse against tribal entities virtually immune to civil liability.

Santa Barbara County, like most counties statewide, is experiencing great difficulty balancing its budget, providing necessary public services, and constructing and maintaining infrastructure. Loss of State and local control and the resulting adverse economic and environmental impacts endanger the quality of life for everyone.

A long-term subsidy of special interest development would diminish the fiscal solvency of our communities and adversely affect our future and our children's futures. Local jurisdictions that must balance their budgets will have no choice but to cut programs that affect health and safety, education, social services, and the environment at a point in the nation's fiscal history when cities and counties are most vulnerable to insolvency—the timing for this "free ride" could not be worse.

The cost of the unmitigated cumulative environmental impacts, the loss of property tax and current or future taxable revenues due to the removal of land out of state regulatory authority and from the tax rolls creates a significant fiscal impact to the moneys already scarce in State and local government general funds.

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Moreover, such an act would be an egregious example of a wealthy few shifting the tax burden to other members of the community.

California, with 110 Tribal governments and 78 more tribal groups seeking federal recognition, has approximately 137 fee-to-trust land acquisition applications pending with the BIA, encompassing more than 15,000 acres of state lands. The cumulative environmental impacts and the cost of the financial removal of these lands from the tax rolls in this State would be in the billions of billions of dollars.

Most of these applications are by the state's most successful gaming tribes. This makes fee-to-trust land acquisitions a serious emerging financial, and public policy issue.

We therefore oppose efforts to this legislation. The legislature should not diminish the state's ability to oppose fee-to-trust transactions and thereby abdicate government's responsibility to represent all citizens, not a select few, no matter how powerful that special interest may be.

Sincerely,

Mark Oliver,
President

cc:

Eric Johnson, Chief Committee Analyst
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Congresswoman Lois Capps
State Senator Tony Strickland
Assemblyman Das Williams
Santa Barbara Third District County Supervisor Doreen Farr
Santa Barbara County CEO Chandra Waller