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May 14, 2019

Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
1615 Capitol Avenue
PO Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, California 95899-7377

RE: AB 18 (Levine): Firearms excise tax

Dear Dr. Smith:

From 2000 to 2015, there were 24,922 firearm homicides and 23,682 firearm suicides in California. Non-Hispanic black men had the highest rate of firearm homicide, while Hispanic men had the greatest number of deaths. However, virtually every community in California has been impacted by gun violence.

The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) is committed to health equity for all Californians. We have determined that we if we are serious about promoting health equity, we must address firearm violence. Therefore, this legislative session CCLHO analyzed several bills addressing firearm violence, and debated those bills at our Semi-Annual Membership Meeting on May 1, 2019.

CCLHO membership voted to recommend a Support position on AB 18 (Levine). This bill would impose an excise tax in the amount of \$25 per firearm on a retailer for the sale of a handgun or semiautomatic rifle or shotgun sold as new. This bill would require that the revenues collected be deposited in the CalVIP Firearm Tax Fund, which the bill would create. These funds would be continuously appropriated to the Board of State and Community Corrections to provide California Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program grants. CCLHO members have indicated a strong support for programs like CalVIP that aim to prevent violence in our highest risk communities.

During our debate on this bill, we concluded that AB 18 would in no way infringe upon any Constitutional right to bear arms. Our members felt that the \$25 excise tax proposed in AB 18 would help to fund programs that help to prevent firearm violence while not placing an undue burden on prospective gun owners. While only a fraction of Californians own a firearm, there are estimated to be over 30 million firearms currently in the state due to individuals owning multiple firearms. So we concluded that most of the purchases impacted by this proposed excise tax are likely to be purchases of additional firearms by current gun owners.

CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Public Health, other departments, boards, commissions, and officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

Should you have any questions, please contact me by email at roidham@placer.ca.gov or by phone at (530) 745-3121.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Oldham, MD, MSHA
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers

