

THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

Office of the President

January 16, 2008

The Honorable Dave Jones
Assembly District 9
State Capitol, Room 3146
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Jones:

RE: AB 624/Coto - Oppose

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the Judiciary Committee yesterday morning to express the Hewlett Foundation's opposition to Assembly Bill 624/Coto. In brief, I share the concerns of the committee members who expressed doubts about whether this bill was responsive to the real needs of disadvantaged communities.

As I mentioned yesterday, the Hewlett Foundation is the largest private foundation in California, and we work on numerous fronts to improve the lives of disadvantaged people in California and around the world. In fact, we have worked closely with Assemblymember Coto, whom we greatly respect, to serve communities of color throughout California.

Our work in California ranges from broadening community participation in solving the state's environmental problems, especially among communities of color, to serving disadvantaged communities in the areas of education and reproductive health. Although we are headquartered in California, more than half of our grantmaking occurs outside the United States – much of it focused on serving disadvantaged communities in developing countries.

The Hewlett Foundation's fundamental operating principle is to direct our resources to organizations that have the promise of making the greatest difference in achieving these goals. Thus, we do not focus on the racial composition of our grantees, but rather on how to achieve measurable impact in improving the lives of the communities that our grant recipients serve.

As Mr. Laird so aptly pointed out yesterday, when a hospital provides care to indigent children, what matters most is whether the child was helped, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the doctor or nurse providing the care. This bill fails to take into account the complicated nature of creating social change or providing needed services.

If enacted into law, the bill's focus on diversity only in California would give a distorted picture of our grantmaking. For example, how would our work to reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa be treated by this bill? Or our commitment to reducing climate change, which disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities?

Moreover, the bill directs foundations to report on the organizations that "serve" minority communities. This section is particularly vague. For example, how would the authors suggest that foundations' efforts to improve public education be characterized?

Finally, the bill places yet another burden on nonprofit organizations, many of which remain understaffed and overworked, to meet yet another reporting requirement.

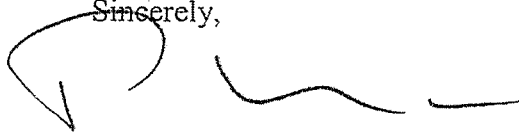
Simply put, this legislation would do nothing to improve the lives of disadvantaged populations in California or elsewhere in the world.

As I mentioned at the start of my testimony, my professional life began as a civil rights lawyer, and the Hewlett Foundation's commitment to social justice was one of its traditions that made the position as its president so attractive. The breadth and depth of that commitment has continued to grow over the years.

I look forward to the opportunity to work together to solve the problems facing California's diverse communities. I thank you for your interest and engagement on these issues.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to follow up to yesterday's hearing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Brest". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Paul Brest