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October 15, 2021

Elaine M. Howle
Auditor of the State of California
621 Capital Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: State Audit of the State's School Facility Program (SFP)

Dear State Auditor Howle:

The purpose of this letter and attachments is to offer information from a practitioner's perspective on the State's School Facility Program (SFP). The Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH) represents practitioners who work in school districts, county offices of education, and businesses involved in serving school districts. As practitioners, we understand and implement the requirements of law at the local level in planning, financing, building/rebuilding school infrastructure and providing safe well maintained school facilities for the education of the TK - 12 students of California. The information and viewpoints offered here originate from those who are charged with serving students directly and keeping them safe. Attached to this letter are two documents that we offer for your review of the SFP, as requested by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC).

The first document, "*A Practitioner's Perspective on the School Facility Program*," contains recommendations for conforming and updating the SFP to the current needs of school districts and county offices of education. In this document, we identify five categories within or associated with the SFP that we propose that you address.

These include:

1. A continuous funding commitment of the SFP by the Legislature;
2. A review and increase of the funding allowances within the SFP to align the per-pupil grant amounts and supplemental funds provided for new construction and modernization with the actual costs of school construction being experienced in 2021 and anticipated construction cost index (CCI) growth;
3. A separate funding allocation with a reservation of funds for small school districts, and for all districts that have a financial hardship or facility hardship circumstance;
4. The preservation of the project eligibility for those projects submitted and currently awaiting funding within the SFP;
5. Equity in TK - 12 Public School Facilities is a State Obligation.

The second document, "*CASH Recommendations: Streamlining the School Facility Program Proposed Modifications – Detailed Information June 18, 2014*," includes recommendations made seven years ago by CASH for improving the efficiency of the SFP without the need for statutory change. It was drafted in response to the criticisms of the SFP that came from the Department of Finance (DOF) and the Administration at that time. The document included the thinking of local practitioners with expertise in working with our State partners at the three key State Agencies that are instrumental in reviewing and approving projects submitted as required



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in order to receive state bond funding through the SFP. We offer it to you now as a source for review. We note also that, although it was not accepted by the DOF or the Administration, a few of the recommendations were adopted gradually by each of the agencies and implemented, thus improving the functioning of the SFP.

It is important for me to comment personally that I appreciate and thank you for your leadership as California goes through this audit. As a facility professional at a county office of education that has experienced first-hand the positive, even transformational, impact of school facilities on our students, I strongly believe in the viability of the SFP to create equity in California's public schools. I and our Vice Chair, Alan Reising, are available to meet with you, your staff and others as the audit of the SFP ensues.

Sincerely,

Jeff Becker,
Chair, Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH)

Cc: Alan Reising, Vice Chair, Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH)
Members, Board of Directors, Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH)