

March 25, 2024

The Honorable Catherine Blakespear
Chair, Senate Elections & Constitutional Amendments Committee
1021 O Street, Room 7340
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 1476 - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Blakespear:

The Consumer Protection Policy Center (CPPC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, academic center of research, teaching, learning and advocacy in regulatory and public interest law based at the University of San Diego School of Law. CPPC supports SB 1476 (Blakespear), which will clarify that the conflict of interest codes of the State Bar of California (State Bar) must be in compliance with the Political Reform Act of 1974 (PRA) and the FPPC's enforcement mechanisms apply to violations of those codes.

For over 40 years, CPPC has studied occupational licensing and monitored California agencies that regulate business, professions, and trades, including the State Bar, Medical Board, and other Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) health care boards. Professor Robert Fellmeth served as State Bar Discipline Monitor for five years. He was appointed by the Attorney General to this statutorily created position and reported to the California Chief Justice and Legislature. Several major reforms were achieved through his ongoing work at the Center for Public Interest Law at the University of San Diego School of Law including amendments to the State Bar Act subjecting the State Bar to the Bagley Keene Open Meetings Act and the Public Records Act.

The State Bar adopted a conflict of interest code consistent with the model code promulgated by the FPPC and requires the reporting of personal and financial interests that could impact decision-making. A *Los Angeles Times* [investigation](#) found that regulators at the State Bar had unethical ties to Thomas V. Girardi, a now-disbarred attorney who had over 200 complaints filed against him. A [report](#) commissioned by the State Bar to gain insight into the extent of the problem noted how unethical behavior contributed to the failure to properly discipline Girardi. This drastically lowered the public's confidence with the State Bar and their role as a regulatory agency.

In recent years, the State Bar has taken a number of actions to address their mishandlings of complaints against attorneys and to restore the public's trust, including changes to their conflict of interest provisions. During that process to strengthen accountability and improve transparency, it became evident that clarifications to the PRA were needed to ensure the State Bar's conflict of interest code must be compliant with the PRA and that the enforcement provisions of the PRA apply to the State Bar.

For these reasons, we are in strong support of SB 1476.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcus Friedman". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and larger than the rest of the letters.

Marcus Friedman
Administrative Director, Consumer Protection Policy Center
Center for Public Interest Law
University of San Diego School of Law