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June 22, 2015

The Honorable Jerry Hill  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 942848  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0058

**RE: SB 21 - Transparency for Elected Official Travel – SUPPORT with Recommended Amendments**

Dear Senator Hill,

On behalf of California Common Cause and our members, I am writing with a letter of support for Senate Bill 21. SB 21 requires that nonprofits that make more than \$10,000 in travel gifts to elected officials, or more than \$5,000 to any one elected official, disclose the donor who paid for this gift and requires all officials to disclose the destination of any travel gifts they received in their annual Statement of Economic Interest.

Under current law, elected officials are prohibited from receiving gifts totaling more than \$460 from a single source in a calendar year. However, some gifts of travel are not counted towards this limit if they are for a government or legislative purpose and are paid for by a nonprofit. Unfortunately, as Common Cause reported in its December 2013 report *Gifts, Influence, & Power*, “a number of special interest groups take advantage of the travel loophole by setting up or using non-profits [to pay for legislator travel]. These special interest funded non-profits then go on to sponsor conferences, overseas trips, and junkets where lobbyists get exclusive access to policymakers without being bound by the gift limits. In addition, these non-profits are not subject to any public disclosure.”

This loophole is troubling considering the amount expended each year on legislator travel. According to reporting by the *Sacramento Bee*, from 2013 to 2014 lawmakers reported accepting almost \$1 million in free travel and related expenses, including gifts of travel to tourist destinations like Maui and Pebble Beach. SB 21 would cast light into the shadows of nonprofit travel gifts by disclosing *who* is funding an elected official’s travel and *where* the official is travelling to. This reform will help distinguish legitimate educational travel from efforts by special interests to skirt California’s gift limit laws.

In furtherance of this goal, Common Cause also recommends that SB 21 be amended to require that nonprofits disclose the policy topic, along with a copy of the agenda, for any event the elected official attended as a result of the nonprofit’s gift, if the event was not open and advertised to the general public.

For all these reasons, California Common Cause strongly supports SB 21, and we look forward to working with your office to ensure that these gifts, too, are properly reported. Please contact me at [nheidorn@commoncause.org](mailto:nheidorn@commoncause.org) or (916) 520-4070 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Nicolas Heidorn  
Policy and Legislative Counsel