Friends Committee on Legislation of California's Recommendation on Proposition 13 on the March 3, 2020 Ballot

For the upcoming Primary election, the FCLCA Board of Directors recommends a YES vote on Proposition 13.

Not to be confused with the infamous Proposition 13 of 1978, which fundamentally altered local government financing and the relationship between the state and local governments, this proposal authorizes the sale of $15 billion in general obligation bonds for public schools and higher education facilities. Proposition 13 was placed on the ballot by the Legislature with broad bipartisan support. If approved by voters, $9 billion would be available for the renovation and construction of K-12 facilities, with another $6 billion for community colleges, CSU and UC facilities.

Children have difficulty learning in crumbling facilities that are rife with unsanitary and dangerous hazards. We have an ongoing responsibility to provide students with adequate and safe learning spaces. While the need is continuous, most of the proceeds from previously issued school bonds have been spent or have been committed for projects.

Proposition 13 is an improvement over previous school bond measures that allocated funds on a first-come, first-serve basis. Under this proposal, funding for health and safety projects such as mitigating earthquake hazards and reducing lead exposure would take priority. The state would also increase its share of funding for school districts that have less ability to raise matching funds and that enroll higher shares of low-income students, foster youth and English learners.

Proposition 13 also allows school districts and community college districts to issue more local bonds while prohibiting developer fees assessed on multifamily residential developments located near transit hubs. These fees significantly increase construction costs at a time when smart residential construction is desperately needed in order to address our state's housing and homelessness crisis without increasing urban sprawl.

Though Friends have a healthy aversion to accumulating debt, California's tax structure does not provide sufficient revenues to address the need for new and improved facilities without negatively affecting funding for other important programs. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that Proposition 13 would have a minor impact on the California's debt-service ratio (the amount that the state spends to pay off General Fund debt as a share of General Fund revenues.) This is because previous bond debts are being retired while General Fund revenues are growing. Moreover, the benefits of Proposition 13 will be realized both by current and future generations. Bond financing for capital improvements spreads the cost over future generations.

For these reasons, FCLCA recommends a YES vote on Proposition 13.

2/6/2020