

## Lowering the Vote Requirement in the California State Budget Process

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2009

- WHEREAS, The foundations of representative democracy in the United States of America, expressed in the writings of America's founding fathers and in the structure of the federal government, call for rule by majority vote; and
- WHEREAS, Within the United States, the legislatures of 46 states pass budgets by a majority vote, and the legislatures of 39 states pass revenue measures by majority vote, making California's two-thirds vote requirement for both budget and revenue measures an uncommon practice; and
- WHEREAS, California's two-thirds vote requirement to pass both the state budget and revenue measures has resulted in a dysfunctional process that promotes political stalemate, long delays in passage of the budget, and a constant imbalance between ongoing revenues and expenditures; and
- WHEREAS, The California State Constitution provides additional checks and balances to the budget process by requiring the budget to be balanced and by allowing the Governor to veto parts or all of the budget; and
- WHEREAS, The timeliness of the California state budget adoption and the quantity and stability of state revenues have profound effects on the public education system, children's health agencies, and other state programs that impact children; and
- WHEREAS, PTA's purposes, core values, legislation platform, and previous resolutions call for adequate and stable financing of public schools and call for programs that protect the health and welfare of children; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts advocate for and actively support a constitutional amendment that reduces the voting margin for passage of both the California State Budget and revenue measures in the California Legislature to a 55 percent vote or a simple majority.

### BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The California state budget process has become dysfunctional, resulting in poorly crafted, consistently late state budgets that have a detrimental impact on public education and other state programs affecting children.

Delays in the passage of the California State Budget have become commonplace. Only four of the last 20 budgets have met the constitutional deadline of passage by June 15. During those delays, the state is not authorized to make some payments, including funding for Medi-Cal providers, child development agencies, categorical funding for K-12 schools, and Cal-Grant scholarships. Individuals and institutions without deep financial reserves suffer during the unfunded period. School districts and other institutions dependent on state revenue are forced

to make their own budgetary decisions and begin the fiscal year without knowing how much funding they will receive from the state.

State budget negotiations frequently degenerate into partisan stalemate, causing lengthy delays in the passage of the budget. The latest example is the 2008-2009 California State Budget, which was a record-breaking 85 days late. The result was a budget that neither party could stand behind. Like our legislators, California voters are concerned.

Nonpartisan budget experts, such as the California Legislative Analyst and the director of the California Budget Project, concur that California legislatures and governors have not addressed the state's structural imbalance between revenues and expenditures. Recurring borrowing, overly optimistic revenue projections, and use of one-time funding for continuing expenses have been features of numerous state budgets. Such budgets do not provide the stable, long-term funding that PTA has always sought for public schools.

Changing the voting margin required for passage of the state budget and revenue measures from the current two-thirds of the state senate and assembly to 55 percent or a simple majority would improve the budget process. With a 55 percent or simple majority, passage of the budget would occur in a timelier manner, providing more stable funding for public schools and other children's services. The California State Constitution would continue to provide checks and balances. The constitution requires a balanced budget and gives the Governor the power to veto line items or the entire budget. An override of the Governor's veto requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature.

The vote of the majority of elected representatives speaks for the majority of California voters. The vast majority of states employ this system, and it embodies the kind of representative democracy envisioned by our nation's founders.

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