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Assemblymember Cristina Garcia Reintroduces Bill to Incentivize the Conversion of Public Golf Courses for Affordable Housing and Open Space

(Sacramento) –Assemblymember Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 1910, which would establish a grant program to provide incentives in the form of grants to local governments that make publicly owned golf courses available for housing and publicly accessible open spaces. This bill expands the options that local governments have should they decide to convert a public golf course and is completely permissive to them.

“Studies show that low-income communities and communities of color have a lack of access to open space and lack housing security. AB 1910 will chip away at these two injustices to help ensure that everyone is safely housed and has a space to recreate,” stated Assemblymember Cristina Garcia.

California is home to 921 public and private golf courses. They vary substantially in size; but often consume about 100 acres of land. Some are better candidates for conversion than others. Ideal sites would be in urban areas with a significant jobs-housing imbalance, and where nearby residents have limited open space. 150 courses could produce 15,000 acres of housing, commercial activity, and open space. At an average density of 40 units per acre, they could produce as many as 600,000 homes, including 150,000 low and very low income affordable homes, and 2,250 acres of public open space.

In the 80s and 90s, golf was on the upswing; but as the National Golf Foundation reports, since 2006, golf is declining. Golf courses struggle to stay open. Some locales spend tax dollars annually to subsidize municipal courses, which means that residents are subsidizing a space that’s underutilized and that they can only use if they know how to and can afford to golf.

“Dense urban communities like mine have very few feasible spaces left to build, the state and local governments need to start thinking outside the box when it comes to building affordable housing units,” further commented Garcia. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) region alone must build over 1.3 million units, a majority of them being affordable, in order to keep up with the pace of need in California.

This will also give people the opportunity to access open space that was not accessible by them in the past, if they didn't have the desire or the income to golf. The amount of people that could benefit from affordable housing and truly open space far outnumbers those that benefit from golf courses. Again, this bill is permissive and simply gives local governments money if they choose to convert a golf course.

“Redeveloping urban, public golf courses offers a unique opportunity to create new neighborhoods within existing communities. We can create a plan to integrate the full spectrum of affordable and attainable housing, from deeply affordable apartments to townhomes and condos for first-time homebuyers, along with recreational and park space and essential neighborhood retail to serve the larger community. AB 1910 can help cities start the visioning process to imagine what is possible!” said Elizabeth Hansberg, Executive Director of People for Housing OC.

“As climate change continues to worsen, California will experience longer and more intense periods of drought. At the same time, the chronic housing shortage and affordability crisis necessitate greater production of affordable homes,” said Leonora Camner, Executive Director for Abundant Housing LA. “Allowing affordable housing to be built on public golf courses is a smart policy solution that addresses both challenges, by curtailing a water-intensive use on public land and making public land available for much more urgent public need.”

AB 1910 will run parallel to a budget request for \$50 million per year for three years submitted to the administration and both houses of the Legislature last fall. This bill is a reintroduction of AB 672 which did not finish the legislative process.

The 58th Assembly District includes the cities of Montebello, Pico Rivera, Commerce, Bell Gardens, Downey, Norwalk, Bellflower, Cerritos, and Artesia.

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