STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0002
(916) 319-2002
FAX (916) 319-2102
DISTRICT OFFICE
280 HEMSTED DRIVE, SUITE 110
REDDING, CA 96002
(530) 223-6300
FAX (530) 223-6737
EMAIL
assemblymember.nielsen@assembly.ca.gov

Assembly
California Legislature

JIM NIELSEN
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, SECOND DISTRICT

COMMITTEES
VICE CHAIR, BUDGET
APPROPRIATIONS
RULES

July 26, 2012

Hon. Bob Blumenfield
Chairman, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairman Blumenfield:

As you are aware, the recent budgetary scandals at the Department of Parks and Recreation have undermined the public's faith in government. As leaders on the Budget Committee, it is imperative that we work together to restore credibility to an already damaged budget process. There are several steps we believe the Legislature should take in the coming days to do just that.

When summer recess ends, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee will decide whether to move forward with a request to audit the fiscal practices of the Department of Parks and Recreation. It is important that this independent audit by the nonpartisan State Auditor move forward expeditiously.

Additionally, in light of fiscal mismanagement, we should also immediately repeal the continuous appropriation of $15 million approved in Senate Bill 1018 and restore Legislative oversight over the entire Parks and Recreation budget.

Another concern is that the hidden special fund money in Parks is just the tip of the iceberg. We must ensure that other state bureaucrats are not hoarding special funds. In a recent San Jose Mercury News article, the Administration acknowledged "they have no system in place to account for $37 billion in "special funds" scattered throughout state government." Since special funds represent close to a third of annual budget expenditures, I'm sure that you share our concern that the culture of deception at the Department of Parks and Recreation might also exist in many other agencies.

Finally, we were encouraged this March, when the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office issued a report entitled, "Strategies to Maintain California's Park System." This insightful report made prudent, thoughtful budget recommendations. The Analyst appropriately points out that many local communities, non-profits and even for-profit organizations have a vested interest in maintaining parks in their communities and should be part of any long-term solutions.

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We ask that you join us and lead the Legislature in enacting the LAO's recommendations. By providing sunshine to past budgetary mismanagement, we can restore the public's faith in how the Legislature spends the people's money.

Sincerely,

JIM NIELSEN
Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Assemblyman, 2nd District

BETH GAINES
Member, Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
Assemblymember, 4th District