

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Chotzen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the Committee,

My name is Cynthia Aguilar-Arizmendi, and I am the Rapid Response Program Manager at Western States Center. We are an organization that works with community leaders, organizers, and institutions to strengthen inclusive democracy and counter anti-democracy threats.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 238A.

I repeat and emphasize what many here have said today: At a time when we are witnessing unprecedented federal overreach, authoritarian policy directives, and the continued militarization of law enforcement, it is both irresponsible and dangerous for this Legislature to authorize the broad, unregulated, and warrantless use of drones by police agencies.

Senate Bill 238A opens the door to the automation of policing -- replacing human officers with aerial surveillance technology in routine interactions with the public. This shift would occur without the appropriate community consultation, or the critical legislative safeguards needed to prevent civil rights violations and protect accountability.

Authorizing this kind of surveillance sets a dangerous precedent. It expands the power of law enforcement at the expense of public accountability, especially for communities that are already overpoliced and historically targeted. It risks being used against people exercising their free speech rights and could chill civic engagement at a time when threats and intimidation are already pushing leaders out of public service. It moves us further away from an inclusive democracy, where all people have the right to feel safe, be heard, and participate without fear of warrantless state surveillance or government intimidation.

We ask the committee to reject Senate Bill 238A in its current form and, instead, urge you to work on this bill in the interim and shift to prioritize community-centered approaches by consulting with folks that will be most impacted by this legislation. We ask that you all prioritize policy that enhances public safety while protecting pro-democracy norms.

Thank you for your time.

Cynthia Aguilar-Arizmendi