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**California Structural Engineers Urge State Lawmakers to Help, Not Hinder,  
At-Risk Public Schools to Qualify for Funds Earmarked for Earthquake Safety**

SACRAMENTO, CA – MAY 6, 2011 – At a special legislative hearing the Structural Engineers Association of California, representing 3000 structural engineers in the State ([www.SEAOC.org](http://www.SEAOC.org)), urged lawmakers to help, not hinder, the efforts of at-risk public schools to qualify for State funds already earmarked for seismic repairs. To date, only three school sites have received \$4.7 million of the \$200 million set aside by the voters five years ago under Proposition 1D. These funds were earmarked to be used to assure school buildings would be able to withstand future earthquakes to keep students and teachers safe within the structures.

SEAOC believes the reason for the funding delay can be attributed to several stumbling blocks including the inaccuracy of the original list of schools identified for upgrades, the administrative requirements schools must meet to qualify for the funds, and the lack of a comprehensive seismic study of all public K-12 schools statewide. SEAOC's

assessment is based on its own analysis and other information made public last month about the State program.

SEAOC's President Steve Pelham, a practicing structural engineer in Sacramento, presented these findings and the group's recommendations for action at the Senate Select Committee on Earthquake and Disaster Preparedness chaired by Sen. Ellen Corbett on April 27, 2011.

In 2002, under Senator Corbett's leadership, the State lawmakers took critical steps toward identifying vulnerable schools. Although the resulting AB 300 report was produced on a shoestring budget, it was a good start -- but it was only a start, noted Mr. Pelham. At that time, the retrofit funding of \$200 million was made available for qualifying projects. However that amount was only 4 to 5 percent of the actual expected funds needed, which was identified to be in the range of \$4 to 5 billion.

At present the State Allocation Board is bogged down in distributing the available \$200 million because schools that initially qualified have not been able to meet unclear administrative requirements or have not been able to produce required local matching funds.

While SEAOC believes California schools are among the safest in the world, the Association also believes that many schools built between 1933 and 1980 need to be strengthened. Therefore, SEAOC told the committee it recommends three steps be taken immediately to increase the safety of California's school children.

1. Allow more vulnerable schools in the high-seismic regions of California to be eligible for the \$200 million in Prop 1D funds. "We recommend that schools be allowed to come forward on a first-come, first-served basis so that funds can be distributed efficiently," Pelham said. He added that, "We must not be fearful of creating a waiting list for funding of eligible buildings. Our greatest liability lies in inaction rather than proactive actions to address the issue."

2. Fund the next step to identify eligible school facilities. “The study initially completed was a triage process and needs to be followed by more thorough seismic evaluations,” noted Mr. Pelham. “Just consider, for example, a recent study by two structural engineering firms under a grant from the California Seismic Safety Commission. As a result of their study, only 20 schools of the 38 schools listed as “Category 2 Most Vulnerable” buildings were found to belong on the list -- a reduction of nearly 50 percent of the buildings considered at risk.”
  
3. Make basic seismic evaluations -- such as ASCE 31, which is the national standard for seismic evaluations -- a required criteria for existing funding sources. “We believe it is bad policy to allow State funds to be spent on at-risk schools unless funds are first used to prevent collapse hazards through deferred maintenance and modernization programs. In sum, we believe that seismic retrofits can be achieved at substantially reduced disruption and cost when coupled with other modernization or deferred maintenance construction work.”

Mr. Pelham also noted that, “CA has passed groundbreaking legislation after local earthquakes, such as the Field Act of 1933, Hospital Facilities Safety Act of 1973, Alquist Hospital Safety Act of 1983 and SB 1953 amendment of 1994. Yet, there is still much to be done. Our timeframe to prepare is short.

“My purpose of testifying was to communicate simple, cost-effective, and immediate steps that can be taken to substantially increase CA’s seismic safety, reduce loss of life, and increase functionality of schools, post disaster centers, and other critical facilities after an earthquake,” he said.

The Structural Engineers Association of California is the premier organization in California of practicing structural engineers. SEAOC’s 3000 members include the front-

line engineering professionals and structural engineers of record providing seismic design for California's schools, hospitals and other essential facilities.

For more information or to interview Mr. Pelham, please contact Patricia Coate, media contact for SEAOC at 503-336-4151.

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