

Paragon Government Relations – Federal Policy Accomplishments

Paragon Government Relations (Paragon) has served as Solano County's federal legislative advocate since 2009. During that time, the firm has successfully promoted the County's policy interests before Congress and the Executive Branch. As a leading voice on federal policy matters that impact county governments, Paragon has earned the trust of the California congressional delegation, key administration officials, and pertinent national organizations, including the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Paragon's approach to lobbying emphasizes teamwork and collaboration. In conjunction with the Board of Supervisors, key Department heads and County staff, the firm has registered several notable achievements on behalf of Solano County. Listed below are some of the firm's recent accomplishments.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Paragon has worked closely with Solano County's congressional delegation to ensure that the County has the federal resources it needs to respond to and recovery from the ongoing public health and economic crises. Among other things, Paragon has aggressively and successfully sought federal support for the County's frontline public health efforts as part of the *CARES Act* (PL 116-136). Additionally, Paragon has helped secure federal resources for other essential local services, including transit operations, law enforcement and emergency response activities, nutrition programs, housing support, and a variety of key social services.

Paragon is currently engaged in efforts to secure federal aid for Solano County as part of a pending fifth coronavirus response package. While the County is receiving Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) dollars via pass-through from the State, Paragon is working to ensure that Solano County will be eligible to receive **direct** federal assistance from the U.S. Department of the Treasury to cover both COVID-19-related expenditures and lost revenues.

Health and Human Services

Since the outset of its representation of Solano County, Paragon has registered several important policy victories in health and human services. Recent achievements include the following:

- *Medicaid* – Paragon has worked tirelessly on behalf of Solano County to protect the Medicaid program from proposed cuts. With the prospect that health care reform efforts could be revived on Capitol Hill, the firm continues to work with the County's congressional delegation and other key members of Congress to maintain the Medicaid program as a means-tested entitlement and preserve provisions in current law allowing for expanded program eligibility and coverage standards.
- *Home Visiting Program* – Paragon has successfully worked to ensure continued funding for evidence-based, cost effective programs operated by Solano County, including the Nurse-Family Partnership and Healthy Families America models. As part of its advocacy efforts, Paragon participates in a national Home Visiting Coalition, with outreach efforts aimed at key members of Congress and committee staff.
- *Prevention and Public Health Fund* – Paragon continues to partner with NACo, the County Health Executives Association of California, and others to protect the Prevention and Public Health Fund. Targeted for elimination as part of recent healthcare proposals,

the nearly \$1 billion annual Fund assists state and local governments and non-profit organizations as they address local community health needs.

- *Child Welfare* – Paragon was directly involved in the development and passage of a recent law that will help Solano County transition to new federal child welfare mandates. Pursuant to PL 116-94, California is receiving over \$52 million for county transition and planning efforts, with no match required to draw down the funds.
- *Human Trafficking* – With human trafficking a grave concern to Solano County, Paragon has continued to advocate for additional federal resources to address this crisis. A recent law (PL 114-22) establishes a Domestic Trafficking Victims Fund, with federal dollars available to counties for a variety of activities aimed at addressing trafficking.
- *Tax on High-Cost Health Insurance Plans* – Paragon was involved in the multi-year effort aimed at eliminating the *Affordable Care Act's* so-called “Cadillac Tax.” After a series of stand-alone bills fell short of final passage, Congress recently repealed the 40 percent excise tax on high-cost health insurance plans (PL 116-94).
- *Funding for Key HHS Programs* – As part of the annual appropriations process, Paragon has successfully fought to bolster funding for a number of programs under the purview of HHS, including: the Child Care and Development Block Grant, behavioral health and substance use disorder prevention and treatment services, Healthy Start, the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, and, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act.
- *Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy* – Paragon has been involved in efforts to promote legislation endorsed by Solano County that would continue health insurance coverage to persons in jails awaiting trial. Pending bills (S 2626/S 2628) would allow counties to continue federally-subsidized health insurance for otherwise eligible individuals who are in custody pending disposition of charges.

Water Resources

Paragon has been a strong advocate for several water projects that are of direct interest to Solano County. The firm has successfully worked with the Army Corps, Bureau of Reclamation, and the County's congressional delegation to ensure continued funding for the following:

- The Solano Project (Reclamation). The project typically receives \$3.5 million annually, which funds various resource management activities, as well as facilities, operations, maintenance, and replacement activities.
- San Pablo Bay and Mare Island Strait (Corps). Funding for operation and maintenance (dredging) activities have totaled between \$3 million and \$6.5 million per year over the course of the past several appropriations/Corps Work Plan cycles.
- Suisun Bay Channel dredging (Corps). Funding has totaled roughly \$4 million to \$6 million per year.
- Other relevant Corps projects receiving annual appropriations: Sacramento River Bank Protection project; Sacramento River, 30-foot project; Sacramento River and Tributaries, debris control; Sacramento River Shallow Draft Channel; San Francisco Bay Long-Term Management Strategy; and San Francisco Bay Delta Model Structure.

Delta Counties Coalition (DCC) – Paragon continues to be an active participant in the DCC on behalf of Solano County. As the County's Washington, D.C. representative, Paragon has worked in concert with the other Delta counties to promote a wide variety of shared water policy interests and objectives with pertinent federal agencies and members of Congress.

California Water/Drought Policy Legislation – Paragon has worked with Solano County’s congressional delegation and other Delta-area lawmakers in opposition to legislation that would block legal protections for the Delta and its fisheries. Although several California water policy changes were enacted in late 2016, the most egregious changes to federal and state water management practices were rejected in Congress due to opposition from Delta-region interests.

Water Infrastructure Legislation – Paragon has promoted Solano County’s priorities as part of the biennial process to renew the *Water Resources Development Act*. Recent reauthorization bills have provided several important reforms, including: the creation of the Water Infrastructure Financing Innovation Act; modifications to the Corps’ levee vegetation removal policy; and, an expanded role local governments in water infrastructure development projects.

Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area – Paragon worked closely with key lawmakers to develop and marshal through Congress recent legislation (PL 116-9) that designates the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta as California’s first National Heritage Area (NHA). The long sought-after designation includes an authorization of \$1 million annually for Delta NHA activities, with funds available to carry out programs and projects that protect important resource values in the Delta.

Transportation Reauthorization

Paragon has successfully promoted Solano County’s surface transportation priorities as part of recent highway and transit reauthorization measures. Specifically, the County’s advocates:

- Played a lead role during the development of the *FAST Act* to increase dedicated federal funding for local, off-system bridges. Paragon also led efforts to secure a provision in federal law that opens funding under the National Highway Performance Program for locally owned bridges that are *on* the federal-aid highway system.
- Worked to ensure that local infrastructure receives more federal-aid highway dollars through a revised Surface Transportation Block Grant Program.
- Successfully advocated for several provisions that streamline the delivery of highway and transit projects, including the creation of a Federal-State environmental reciprocity program.
- Successfully fought to remove legislative language that would have rescinded unobligated balances for previously earmarked transportation projects, including several projects in Solano County.

Paragon is currently involved in efforts to reauthorize the *FAST Act*, which is slated to expire on October 1, 2020. Among other things, Paragon helped secure language in the pending House reauthorization bill (HR 2) that would provide local transportation agencies with up to six years to utilize Emergency Relief (ER) program funding to repair roads that have been damaged in a disaster. The provision is critically important to local agencies in California, where FHWA has recently denied many time-extension requests for ER projects.

Local Law Enforcement Funding

Paragon has worked to protect and enhance funding for key local law enforcement and criminal justice programs that are of direct interest to Solano County, including the Community Oriented Policing Services program, Justice Assistance Grant/Byrne funds, and the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program.

Housing, Community Development, and Homeless Assistance

Paragon has worked closely with Solano County's congressional delegation to protect key housing and community development programs from proposed budget cuts, including the CDBG program, Homeless Assistance Grants, the HOME Investment Partnerships program, and the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.

In addition, and given the severity of homelessness in California, Paragon has been a leading advocate for providing additional tools to counties to combat the crisis. For example, Paragon has worked closely with the sponsors of legislation (S 923/HR 1978) that would help counties fund a range of initiatives. Paragon also has been involved in the development of a comprehensive housing bill (S 2613/HR 1856) that would, among other things, create additional permanent supportive housing and increase the availability of Section 8 housing vouchers.

Tribal Affairs

Fee-to-Trust Reform – Paragon has been the leading voice among local government advocates in promoting legislative reforms to the U.S. Department of the Interior's fee-to-trust process. Since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its controversial decision in *Carcieri v. Salazar*, Paragon has actively promoted the need for comprehensive trust reform, including statutory standards that would provide counties with a meaningful voice in the land-into-trust process.

Scotts Valley Casino – Paragon has provided members of the Solano County Board of Supervisors and County staff with access to key decision makers within the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Indian Affairs. The County's Washington representatives have arranged for meetings between Solano County and Department officials regarding the Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians' efforts to have land in Vallejo taken into federal trust status.

Disaster Preparedness and Resiliency

Paragon worked closely with Congressman Garamendi regarding the development of his recently introduced *FEMA Disaster Preparedness Improvement Act*. The bill (HR 6071) would make several important reforms to federal law to help local governments better prepare for and respond to wildfires, storms, earthquakes, and droughts.

Similarly, Paragon has been involved in efforts to develop legislation (HR 5091/S 2882) that would authorize \$1 billion annually to help communities become more resilient to wildfires. Pursuant to the bill, eligible entities, including counties, could receive grants of up to \$250,000 to help them develop Community Wildfire Defense Plans (CWDP); those communities would then be eligible to receive up to \$10 million to help with plan implementation.

Veterans Affairs

Paragon has helped build support for legislation entitled the *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act* (HR 5516), which would bolster Solano County's current investments in serving the community's veterans by allocating \$250 million in new competitive grant funding to the VA over the next five years. Currently, the Board of Supervisors funds those efforts with a general fund contribution equaling approximately 61 percent of the CSVO budget, with the remaining supported by state resources. Pursuant to the bill, the VA would enter into contracts with states to award grants to promote health and wellness, prevent suicide and improve outreach to veterans.