



ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL

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July 31, 2026

Open Letter to the California State Senate in Support of Assembly Bill 1608 Regarding the Office of the Inspector General for High-Speed Rail

Dear California Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón and Members of the California State Senate:

The Association of Inspectors General (AIG) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that represents thousands of members working in hundreds of offices of inspector general (OIG) across nearly all 50 states, U.S. territories and internationally. For 30 years, AIG has worked to advance government integrity and accountability, and to promote excellence among OIGs, including publishing and promoting the Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General (known as the “Green Book”)—widely recognized as the industry standard of principles and best practices for OIGs at every level of government.

AIG's Green Book identifies foundational elements necessary for effective oversight, including organizational independence, access to information, adequate resources, transparency, accountability, and professional competency. In evaluating legislation affecting OIGs, AIG assesses whether proposed changes strengthen or diminish these core principles.

In AIG's opinion, Assembly Bill 1608 (AB 1608) and the mirrored provisions recently enacted through Senate Bill 169 (the transportation budget trailer bill) advance these oversight principles and promote the effectiveness of the Office of the Inspector General, High-Speed Rail (OIG-HSR). AIG is in support of AB 1608 and encourages the California State Senate to approve this legislation, following its recent passage by the California State Assembly.

AB 1608 enhances the operational independence of the OIG-HSR by providing greater flexibility in personnel administration and contracting authority, and reducing unnecessary administrative constraints. AIG's Green Book recognizes an OIG must possess sufficient autonomy and resources to recruit, retain, and deploy qualified professionals necessary to fulfill its oversight mission.

The bill also strengthens the OIG-HSR's ability to obtain information necessary to conduct audits, investigations, inspections, and reviews. AIG has long recognized that timely and unrestricted access to records, personnel, and information is fundamental to meaningful oversight. Clarifying that confidential information may be shared with the OIG-HSR without waiving applicable protections removes barriers to oversight while preserving legitimate confidentiality interests.

AB 1608 further advances transparency and accountability through enhanced reporting and publication requirements. Public confidence in government oversight depends upon the ability of OIGs to communicate findings, recommendations, and concerns to policymakers and the public. The bill's reporting provisions support these objectives and reinforce the accountability function that inspectors general are intended to serve.

AIG recognizes that the bill authorizes limited withholding of information deemed confidential by the Inspector General of OIG-HSR, where public disclosure would create a substantial and articulable risk. Such provisions are consistent with established OIG practices regarding confidentiality, when accompanied by appropriate safeguards.

OIGs routinely encounter privileged and/or confidential information in the course of conducting investigations and audits, and specific disclosure requirements vary by jurisdiction. AB 1608 requires full or partial public disclosure of reports when feasible; notice and justification whenever information has been withheld; continued review of whether confidentiality remains necessary; and significantly, that the OIG-HSR "deliver a confidential report, or a confidential portion of the report, that describes and makes recommendations to resolve the identified weaknesses to state officials with oversight of the project." These safeguards reasonably balance government transparency with the protection of sensitive/confidential information and oversight integrity.

As the AIG Green Book section "Quality Standards for Offices of Inspector General" states:

Privileged or confidential information gathered by the OIG will be protected from disclosure unless the OIG determines that such disclosure is required by law or necessary to further the purposes of an OIG activity [...] Procedures for releasing OIG records to the public will be established, including the designation of those OIG staff authorized to make disclosure determinations.

AIG's support for AB 1608 is based exclusively on the bill's assessed effect on the structure, authority, independence, transparency, and effectiveness of the OIG-HSR. Consistent with AIG's mission as a nonpartisan organization for inspectors general and oversight professionals, AIG does not take a position on the policy merits, funding decisions, management practices, project delivery methods, or overall viability of the California High-Speed Rail program.

Viewed through the framework of AIG's Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, AB 1608 and the mirrored provisions enacted through Senate Bill 169 represent a meaningful enhancement of OIG-HSR independence, access to information, operational effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. These are foundational characteristics of successful OIGs and are essential to maintaining public trust in government oversight.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Fletcher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Will" and last name "Fletcher" clearly distinguishable.

Will Fletcher, President
Association of Inspectors General