



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

September 22, 2016

Tim Strack
Chairman
California Seismic Safety Commission
1755 Creekside Oak Drive, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95833

Dear Chairman Strack:

I urge you to develop a legislative proposal to present to the legislature during the next session that would require California localities to adopt plans to identify and retrofit seismically-unsafe buildings. I also ask that you consider ensuring such a proposal provides additional funding for under-resourced localities to implement this critical change.

The Government Accountability Office is releasing a report this week examining seismic safety issues, and one of its key findings is that state and local governments must do more to identify and mitigate seismically-unsafe buildings. The report notes that the Cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, in particular, have taken significant steps to address high risk buildings and that the two plans provide good examples of how to balance public safety, limited resources, and feasibility. I have met with seismic safety officials from both jurisdictions, and I believe that their efforts should serve as a model for other California municipalities.

However, many California communities do not have the same level of resources or institutional capacity as Los Angeles and San Francisco, and they have not taken similarly aggressive steps to address seismic safety risks. An August 25, 2016 article published in the *Los Angeles Times* reports that San Bernardino and Bakersfield are two communities that have numerous high-risk commercial and residential buildings but no clear plan to address them. Earthquake scientists now have the technical ability to determine exactly which buildings will cause the most casualties during an earthquake, and it is time that California makes a concerted, state-wide effort to address this known public safety risk. I believe that communities need to first identify high-risk buildings and then establish a feasible plan to ensure that vulnerable structures are retrofitted or replaced.

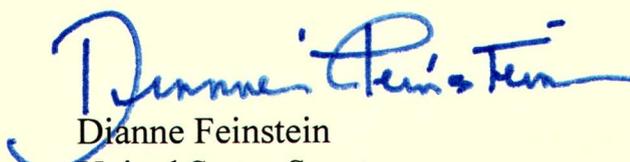
It is only a matter of time before the next catastrophic earthquake strikes California. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that there is a greater than 99 percent chance that a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake will occur in California within the next 30 years. However, even smaller earthquakes can cause major damage to seismically-unsafe buildings. The magnitude 6.2 earthquake that struck central Italy last month – which reportedly caused 291 deaths – is one further tragic reminder that a failure to mitigate known seismic safety risks puts lives in grave danger. Earthquakes that are at least magnitude 6.0 occur every 1.2 years on average in California. The magnitude 6.0 South Napa Earthquake that occurred at 3:20am on August 24, 2014, caused significant damage to unreinforced masonry buildings and would likely have resulted in more injuries and deaths had it occurred during business hours.

I recognize that many California municipalities, particularly some that are among the most severely impacted, like San Bernardino, do not have the resources to conduct the large-scale inventorying and retrofiting programs necessary to fully protect their citizens from known earthquake risks. Therefore, I strongly urge you to craft a proposal that includes making state funds available to municipalities in order to take additional seismic safety measures, particularly for those that are under-resourced.

I fear that California is not nearly as prepared for a major earthquake as it should be, given our history and the significant scientific gains that earth scientists and seismic engineers have made in recent years. Earthquakes are a ticking time bomb in California, and I believe we owe it to our constituents to do as much as we can to prepare before the next “big one” strikes.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and I look forward to working with you to improve California’s earthquake preparedness and resilience.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

cc: Members of the Commission

Richard McCarthy
Executive Director, California Seismic Safety Commission

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