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Contact: Taylor Gonsalves

Phone: (916) 319-2053

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Legislation Clarifying Media Access to Closed Disaster Areas Clears the Senate Public Safety Committee

(Sacramento, CA) – This morning, Assembly Bill (AB) 750, authored by Assemblymember Freddie Rodriguez (D – Pomona), unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Public Safety and is now headed to the Senate Floor. This legislation would clarify that members of the press are not authorized to transport a civilian into a disaster zone that has been closed by law enforcement.

“As a career first responder, I understand the dangers involved when entering a closed disaster zone and know that things can shift following an earthquake, wildfire, or other disasters, posing an additional risk to those evaluating these scenes. These closed areas are unsafe for the average civilian, and current law must be clarified to ensure the media does not abuse their authorization and transport residents into these dangerous zones,” **stated Assemblymember Rodriguez.**

Existing law generally provides that whenever a menace to public health or safety is created by a disaster such as a flood, storm, fire, earthquake, or other disasters, law enforcement may close the area using ropes, markers, or guards to any person not authorized by the officer to enter or remain within the enclosed area.

Senate Bill [\(SB\) 98](#) (McGuire, Chapter 759, Statutes of 2021) permitted members of the press to enter an area closed following a disaster. Unfortunately, following the enactment of SB 98, there were reports of media personnel transporting non-authorized civilians into closed disaster areas. For example, the [Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office reported](#) they were investigating reports that the media brought civilians into evacuation zones during the McKinney Fire in 2022.

The existing law is unclear if members of the press can transport unauthorized civilians into the secured area, so this bill would allow media personnel to continue their duty of informing the public while also keeping the public safe. Furthermore, this bill does not create a new crime but provides additional guidance in statute to remove the current ambiguities in the law.

“While the press is critical to evaluating emergencies and informing the public, transporting individuals into these areas places them at unnecessary risk. AB 750 will tighten up the current law to ensure the press does not extend their access to unauthorized individuals,” **added Assemblymember Rodriguez.**

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Assemblymember Rodriguez ([Twitter](#)) represents the 53rd Assembly District which includes the cities of Chino, Montclair, Ontario, Pomona, and Upland. He is Chair of the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management.