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CA state senator seeks to fund affordable housing

By JACOB ADELMAN Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES—Affordable housing advocates said Friday they support a state senator's plan to secure money for low-income homes if Gov. Jerry Brown is successful in dissolving redevelopment agencies under his proposed austerity budget.

The support for the plan by Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord, was seen as a sign of a crack in the coalition of non-profit organizations, builders and government officials that have been seeking to protect the agencies.

Jeff Schaffer, Southern California director with the non-profit Enterprise Community Partners, said affordable housing providers want redevelopment agencies to be preserved.

"At the same time, we're hearing from legislators or their staffs that there may not be a way to make that fly," he said. "If that's the case, those of us working in the affordable housing field and seeing the need for affordable housing, we see a need to preserve those dollars."

DeSaulnier's plan endorses the governor's strategy of using redevelopment agency funds to help pay down the 2011-2012 budget deficit.

After that, affordable housing would be added to the roster of schools, fire departments and other locally provided services that the governor wants to fund

with money now going to redevelopment agencies.

The senator's plan puts regional governmental bodies, such as the Southern California Association of Governments and the Association of Bay Area Government, in charge of distributing the money to cities that

want to use it for affordable housing.

The funds are currently managed by redevelopment agencies, some of which have been criticized for spending too lavishly on administration and other overhead expenses.

The proposal could be added to a budget package the state Legislature is set to vote on next week,

"I'm good with the governor's proposal, but this is an option," DeSaulnier said. "It basically gives local government the power to deal with housing set-aside money in a much more efficient way in the future."

Carroll Wills, a spokesman for California Professional Firefighters, which has fervently supported the governor's plan to use redevelopment money for local services, said his group saw the senator's plan as a good one.

"It's consistent with the notion that government funds should be used to provide for those who need to be provided for at the base level," he said.

A message left at the governor's office asking whether Brown would support DeSaulnier's plan was not returned.

Kathy Fairbanks, a spokeswoman for the California Redevelopment Association, stressed that the proposal has not been formally introduced as part of any legislation. The organization opposed any

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plan that dissolves the agencies, she said.

Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing executive director Paul Zimmerman said his organization would prefer an outcome that preserved the agencies. But with legislators seemingly on their way to dissolving the agencies, he hoped DeSaulnier's proposal would be enacted.

"This proposal offers a both positive and effective solution to preserving this important affordable housing funding," he said.

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