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## Commentary: Strengthening safe, timely anesthesia services for all

By Kuljit Sapraj, CRNA

Central California feeds the state and the nation. Yet too often, our region does not receive the same investment in health care that we give back in food, energy, and labor. Rural families deserve better.

As a [Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist](#) (CRNA) practicing in Madera County, I know [the challenges](#) our communities face in accessing safe and timely care. When Madera Community Hospital [reopened this year](#), it was a victory for our entire region – thanks to the leadership of Senator Anna Caballero, Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria, AAM, and many others who understood what was at stake. Their work ensured that over 150,000 residents once again have care close to home.

But our work is not finished. Rural California continues to face provider shortages, rising costs, and the very real threat of more closures. [Adventist Health](#) has already warned that two Central Valley hospitals are at risk. Across the nation, nearly one in five Americans lives in a “[health care desert](#),” where services like maternity care, surgery, or anesthesia are simply unavailable. We cannot allow that to happen here.

That's why [AB 876](#) so important. Championed by Assemblymember Heath Flora, this bill is a lifeline for rural hospitals and their patients. AB 876 makes clear that CRNAs – highly trained anesthesia professionals – have [long-standing authority to provide care independently](#). This clarity is critical for small hospitals and community clinics that operate on [razor-thin margins](#) and cannot afford duplicate roles, costly delays, or restrictive policies that take providers away from the bedside.

For decades, CRNAs have safely delivered anesthesia in every setting – from surgical centers and maternity wards to trauma bays – including in California counties where there is a reduction in physician anesthesiologists. We are trusted members of the health care team, committed to showing up day and night, rural or urban, wherever anesthesia is needed.

AB 876 empowers hospitals to use every available provider efficiently, keeping care affordable, timely, and local. For Central Valley families, this can mean the difference between receiving treatment in their own community or having to travel hours for surgery.

For the patients I serve in Madera County and across the Valley, the message is simple: AB 876 protects access to safe anesthesia services, prevents dangerous gaps in care, and ensures that no Californian is left behind because of their zip code.

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