

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1693 (Zbur) – As Introduced February 3, 2026

Policy Committee:	Local Government	Vote:	10 - 0
	Business and Professions		18 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires a local building department to allow a qualified professional certifier, defined as a licensed architect or engineer, to certify compliance with applicable building, health, and safety codes for a tenant improvement plan related to a retailer.

Among its provisions, this bill:

- 1) Defines a “qualified professional certifier” as an architect or professional engineer licensed pursuant to the Business and Professions Code, who has at least five years of experience in commercial building design or plan review and maintains professional liability insurance of at least \$2 million per occurrence.
- 2) Defines “tenant improvement” as a change to the interior of an existing building.
- 3) Requires a local building department to allow, upon request from an applicant for permit for a tenant improvement relating to a retailer, a qualified professional certifier to certify at the applicant’s expense compliance with applicable building, health, and safety codes for the tenant improvement.
- 4) Requires a tenant improvement relating to a retailer certified pursuant to this bill to comply with building standards approved by the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC) and local building standards in effect at the time the applicant submits the application for a permit.
- 5) Requires a qualified professional certifier to prepare an affidavit, under penalty of perjury, attesting the tenant improvement plans and specifications comply with all applicable laws and regulations.
- 6) If the local building or permitting department does not approve or deny the application within 20 business days of receiving a complete application, including the affidavit specified in item 5, above, or within 10 business days of receiving resubmitted corrected plans, deems a certified plan approved for permitting purposes, provided all fees and required documents have been submitted.
- 7) Requires each local building or permitting department to conduct a random audit of at least 20% of all tenant improvements submitted per week for certification under this bill, as specified.

- 8) Provides that any false statement in a certification submission made under this bill is grounds for disciplinary action by the California Architects Board or the Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, and Geologists, as applicable.
- 9) Authorizes local jurisdictions to impose reasonable administrative penalties, including fines, for willful noncompliance with the requirements of this bill.
- 10) Provides that qualified professional certifiers are liable for any damages arising from negligent plan review.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) The California Architects Board (CAB) anticipates minor and absorbable costs (special fund) associated with an increase in complaints and the Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, and Geologists (BPELSG) anticipates no additional costs.
- 2) Local building departments may incur costs to perform audits of tenant improvements submitted for certification, and to review reports received from private providers and issue or deny building permits within 20 days of receiving such a report or within 10 days upon resubmittal. Because the cost to use a qualified professional certifier will be borne by the applicant (not the local agency), local agency costs to review reports will be offset to the extent savings accrue from performing fewer plan-checking functions.

Local costs resulting from this bill are not reimbursable by the state because local agencies have general authority to charge and adjust planning and permitting fees to cover their administrative expenses associated with new planning mandates.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Brick-and-mortar retailers are essential to vibrant neighborhoods and local economic recovery, but too often businesses—especially small and family-owned ones—face months-long permitting delays just to make interior improvements to existing buildings. Those delays hurt workers, communities, and commercial corridors still recovering from the pandemic, recent fires, and prolonged vacancies. [This bill], for interior improvement projects, allows licensed architects or engineers to certify that plans meet all building and safety codes, while requiring local governments to act on complete applications within clear, predictable timelines—with full oversight intact.

- 2) **Background. *California Building Standards Code.*** The California Building Standards Code contains building standards and regulations adopted by the CBSC to protect the health and safety of people and property. The code regulates the design, construction, quality of materials, use and occupancy, location, and maintenance of all buildings and structures in the state, and includes standards for building safety, fire safety standards, energy efficiency standards, and standards for green buildings. Local government building and planning departments enforce the code.

Existing law requires a local building department or permitting agency to contract with or employ a private entity or persons on a temporary basis to perform plan-checking functions, such as compliance with building, health, and safety codes, upon the request of an applicant when there is an “excessive delay” in checking the applicant’s plans and specifications. For a nonresidential permit for the remodeling or tenant improvements of a building, excessive delay generally means the local building department has taken more than 50 days after receiving a complete application to complete the structural building safety plan check.

Last year, AB 671 (Wicks and Gabriel), Chapter 470, Statutes of 2025, authorized qualified professional certifiers to self-certify that tenant improvement plans for restaurants comply with all applicable building, health, and safety codes, and required local building departments to approve or reject those plans within 20 days. Plans that are not acted upon within that period are approved by default.

Modeled after AB 671, this bill authorizes qualified professional certifiers to self-certify tenant improvement plans for retailers, as well. According to the author, this bill will allow family-owned and small businesses to open more quickly and avoid unnecessary costs and delays.

Qualified Professional Certifiers. Consistent with existing law pursuant to AB 671, this bill defines a “qualified professional certifier” as an architect or professional engineer licensed by the CAB or the BPELSG who has at least five years of experience in commercial building design or plan review and maintains professional liability insurance, as specified. The CAB is responsible for licensing and regulating architects in California. The BPELSG is responsible for licensing and regulating professional engineers in California.

- 3) **Support and Opposition.** The California Retailers Association and Westside Council of Chambers of Commerce, cosponsors of the bill, assert this bill will reduce permitting delays and promote economic activity within California’s small business community while maintaining appropriate safety and compliance standards.

The California Building Officials are opposed to this bill and assert:

Local jurisdictions, at a minimum, need to offer approvals and assurances that state and local building, fire, and life safety codes have been met. Allowing someone who has been hired to draw plans with an economic incentive for their expedited approval is not a responsible practice – regardless of the scale of the development project.

- 4) **Related Legislation.** AB 1915 (Gabriel), of this legislative session, as it relates to this bill, establishes a streamlined approval process for local permits for like-for-like equipment installations at restaurants. AB 1915 is pending in this committee.

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