
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Senator Blakespear, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1732
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Version: 4/27/2026
Urgency: No
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Hearing Date: 6/24/2026
Fiscal: Yes

SUBJECT: California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: affordable housing projects: public university or public college housing projects

DIGEST: This bill adds public university and college housing projects (for students, faculty, and staff) to an existing California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) exemption for affordable housing projects and extends the exemption's sunset from 2033 to 2037.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Under CEQA, a lead agency determines whether a project is exempt from CEQA, or if it must do an initial study to determine if a project will have significant effects on the environment. If a project has no effect on the environment or effects that can be mitigated, the lead agency prepares a negative declaration (ND) or mitigated ND (MND). If the project will have significant impacts, the lead agency prepares an environmental impact report (EIR) to evaluate and propose mitigation measures for any effects on the environment, including impacts or likely impacts to land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and historic or aesthetic significance. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§21000 et seq.)
- 2) Establishes specific CEQA exemptions for infill development and housing development, including:
 - a) A CEQA exemption for housing projects up to 20 acres in size in urban infill areas, so long as they are not located on specific sensitive sites, and are consistent with existing general plan or specific plan if applicable, and meets set density requirements (i.e., at least 5 units per acre for an unincorporated area in a nonmetropolitan county, 10 units per acre in a suburban jurisdiction, and 15 units per acre in a metropolitan jurisdiction).
 - b) Residential projects, employment center projects, and mixed-use development projects, including any subdivision or zoning change, that are:

- i) within a transit priority area;
 - ii) undertaken to implement and is consistent with a specific plan for which an EIR has been certified; and
 - iii) consistent with the general use designation, density, building intensity, and applicable policies specified for the project area in either a sustainable communities strategy (SCS) or alternative planning strategy (APS) for which the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has accepted a metropolitan planning organization's determination that the SCS or APS would achieve the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets (PRC §21155.4), commonly known as the transit-oriented development (TOD) exemption.
- c) Specifies residential housing projects which meet detailed criteria established to ensure the project does not have significant effects on the environment (PRC §§21159.21 – 21159.124). These exemptions are available to:
- i) Urban infill housing projects not more than 100 units on a site not more than four acres in size which is within one-half mile of a major transit stop;
 - ii) Affordable agricultural housing projects not more than 45 units on a site not more than five acres in size; and
 - iii) Urban affordable housing projects not more than 100 units on a site not more than 5 acres in size.
- 3) Establishes a ministerial approval process (i.e., not subject to CEQA) for certain multifamily affordable housing projects in local jurisdictions that have not met regional housing needs. Eligibility is contingent on labor standards and site specifics. (Government Code (GOV) § 65913.4)
- 4) Establishes a ministerial approval process for affordable housing projects in commercial zones. Requires eligible projects to pay prevailing wage to construction workers and requires projects of 50 units or more to participate in an apprenticeship program and make specified healthcare contributions for construction workers. (GOV § 65912.100 et seq., added by AB 2011 (Wicks), Chapter 647, Statutes of 2022)
- 5) Exempts from CEQA, until January 1, 2030, a public university housing project, as defined, carried out by a public university on real property owned by the public university that is consistent with the university's most recent LRDP EIR, is LEED platinum, has low vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and does not result in any net greenhouse gases (GHGs), among other criteria (PRC 21080.58)

- 6) Exempts from CEQA specified actions related to qualifying affordable housing projects, including the issuance of entitlements, land disposition actions, rezonings or plan amendments required to facilitate the project, and the provision of financial assistance, if the project meets specified requirements in AB 1449 (Alvarez, 2023) meeting the following criteria:
 - a) Defines a qualifying “affordable housing project” as a project consisting of multifamily residential uses only or a mix of multifamily residential and nonresidential uses, with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use, that meets one of the following:
 - i) All residential units, excluding managers’ units, are dedicated to lower income households; or
 - ii) The project is on a site owned by a local educational agency and complies with specified affordability requirements.
 - b) Requires the affordable housing project to meet specified labor standards, including prevailing wage requirements and, for projects of 50 or more units, additional labor standards.
 - c) Requires the affordable housing project to be located on infill areas meeting the following criteria for the parcel or parcels:
 - i) In a city where the city boundaries include some portion of an urbanized area or urban cluster, or in an unincorporated area where the parcel is wholly within an urbanized area or urban cluster;
 - ii) Within one-half mile walking distance of a major transit stop or high-quality transit corridor;
 - iii) In a very low VMT area; or
 - iv) Proximal to specified amenities.
 - d) Requires the project to meet specified site and environmental conditions
 - e) Requires the lead agency, when applying this exemption, to file a notice of exemption with the Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) and the county clerk.
 - f) Sunsets the CEQA exemption above, on January 1, 2033.

This bill:

- 1) Expands an existing CEQA exemption for qualifying affordable housing projects to also apply to public university or public college housing projects, and related actions. Public university or public college housing projects are eligible for the CEQA exemption if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) Labor standards established in AB 2011 (Wicks), Chapter 647, Statutes of 2022;

- b) The project is located on parcels in these locations:
 - i) In a city where the city boundaries include some portion of either an urbanized area or urban cluster;
 - ii) In an unincorporated area where the legal parcel or parcels are wholly within the boundaries of an urbanized area or urban cluster;
 - iii) Within one-half mile walking distance of either a high-quality transit corridor or a major transit stop;
 - iv) In a very low VMT area; or
 - v) Proximal to six or more specified amenities; and
- c) The project is located on a site where parcels developed with urban uses adjoin at least 75% of the perimeter, or at least three sides of a four-sided site.
- d) The project is not located on any of the following sites as specified:
 - i) A vacant site that contains tribal cultural resources that could be affected by the development that were found pursuant to a consultation process;
 - ii) A coast zone, as specified;
 - iii) Either prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance;
 - iv) Wetlands;
 - v) Within a very high fire hazard severity zone;
 - vi) A hazardous waste site;
 - vii) Within a delineated earthquake fault zone;
 - viii) Within a flood plain;
 - ix) Within a floodway;
 - x) Lands identified for conservation in an adopted natural community conservation plan, habitat conservation plan, or other adopted natural resource protection plan;
 - xi) Habitat for protected species identified as candidate, sensitive, or species of special status by state or federal agencies, fully protected species, or species protected by the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, the California Endangered Species Act, or the Native Plant Protection Act, as specified; or,
 - xii) Lands under conservation easement.
- e) Requires that sites be evaluated for hazardous substances in a phase one environmental assessment and preliminary endangerment assessment as needed, and requires mitigation if any hazardous substances are found to exist on the site.
- f) Requires that the site be set back 500 feet from a freeway and 3200 feet from a facility that actively extracts or refines oil or natural gas.

- 2) Extends the sunset date for the CEQA exemption for both affordable housing projects and public university or public college housing projects from January 1, 2033, to January 1, 2037.

Background

- 1) *The A, B, C's of CEQA.* CEQA is an environmental planning law designed to (a) make government agencies and the public aware of the environmental impacts of a proposed project, (b) ensure the public can take part in the review process, and (c) identify and implement measures to mitigate or eliminate any negative impact the project may have on the environment.

CEQA is enforced by civil lawsuits that can challenge any project's environmental review, and it is the only state environmental law that allows civil suits. Under CEQA, projects (unless they have a specific exemption) must undergo environmental analysis.

This process starts with an initial study which determines what level of further environmental review is needed for a given project. If a project has no significant effects on the environment, or if those effects can be fully mitigated, the project can move forward with a negative declaration (ND) or mitigated negative declaration (MND). If the initial study finds the project has potential significant effects on the environment, then a full EIR is conducted. An EIR provides a thorough environmental review of a proposed project, analyzing the significant direct and indirect environmental impacts of a proposed project. The EIR also includes proposed mitigation measures for any significant effects that it identifies and considers alternatives to the proposed project.

- 2) *CEQA exemptions.* A project is exempt from CEQA if it is ministerial (i.e., it does not involve discretionary decisions), or if there is a specific statutory or categorical exemption that applies to the project. Statutory exemptions are created by the Legislature and apply even if a project has the potential to significantly affect the environment. In contrast, categorical exemptions, which are listed in the CEQA guidelines, generally do not apply if there are significant environmental impacts associated with the project.
- 3) *CEQA exemptions for infill and student housing.* Numerous exemptions already exist for infill housing. Primary among these is the very broad infill housing exemption passed in 2025 in AB 130 (AB 130, Chapter 22, Statutes of 2025).

Existing law also already includes a specific exemption for student housing at the UCs. The exemption for student housing at the UCs was initially developed in 2022 through SB 886, and was later revised in 2024 through SB 312. To qualify for the CEQA exemption for student and faculty housing projects, universities had to attain very high environmental and labor criteria, including requirements that the project be consistent with the university's long range development plan, that the project be eligible for LEED platinum, that the project does not result in any additional GHGs, that the project meets certain labor criteria, and that the project is not located sensitive sites as defined.

- 4) *Need for student housing.* A recent report from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) shows that students spend more on housing than tuition while attending public university.¹ While public colleges have made significant efforts to house students on campus in recent years, the vast majority of California's college students still rely on a limited number of increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible off-campus housing units available through the private market. While public universities are not required to obtain approval to build student housing on their own land, so long as they have a master plan in place, private developers building housing near college campuses must undergo an often lengthy and costly approval process. Furthermore, student housing need is not accounted for in the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process by the California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD), so Californians attending university may be underserved by our current production pipeline.

According to a 2023 survey from the California Student Aid Commission, a majority of California college students experience rent burdens and housing insecurity due to high housing costs.² Nearly 24% of CCC, 11% of CSU, and 8% of UC students are unable to keep up with the high cost of housing and fall into homelessness in a given year.³

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of Bill.* According to the author, "California's public colleges and universities are among the finest higher education institutions in the world. They are also at the frontlines of the student housing crisis, yet they are

¹ [https://www.ppic.org/publication/keeping-college-affordable-for-california-students/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20for%20a%20majority,community%20college%20\(Figure%201\).](https://www.ppic.org/publication/keeping-college-affordable-for-california-students/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20for%20a%20majority,community%20college%20(Figure%201).)

² https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/food_and_housing_basic_needs_survey_2023.pdf?1700100691&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=California+Democrats+gather+to+pick+favorites+-+and+party&utm_campaign=WhatMatters

³ <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2024/4898/Update-on-Student-Housing-Assistance-050724.pdf>

uniquely disadvantaged by a legal technicality that prevents them from accessing the same CEQA streamlining available to private higher education institutions and other housing developers. AB 1732 closes this gap. By extending the infill exemption framework to housing projects consistent with public higher education land use plans, we can accelerate the construction of the affordable student housing that our students urgently need, without sacrificing environmental protections or labor standards.

“UC, CSU and CCC Campus housing projects are some of the most environmentally friendly buildings and located in already dense areas, often around transit options. In fact, several public higher education land use plans explicitly reference campus housing as a Vehicle Miles Traveled-reduction strategy. At a time when housing insecurity affects students and employees across California's public higher education system, it is difficult to justify maintaining procedural barriers that private developers and private colleges are not required to overcome.”

- 2) *Intuitive infill definition.* The CEQA exemption for a campus housing proposed in AB 1732 is restricted to infill areas as defined in AB 1449. AB 1449 established a definition of infill that is more broad than what had previously been considered in the CEQA guidelines and directly speaks to the experience of residents living in the housing being developed. This definition of infill requires that three sides of a parcel be surrounded by urban uses, has urban density requirement, and specifies that eligible areas are within walking distance to either a high-quality transit corridor or a major transit stop and be in a very low vehicle travel area, among others. These criteria serve a dual purpose: they add important guardrails to ensure that the more permissive definition of urban infill does not result in increased VMT and makes it easier to identify which geographic areas are eligible for this exemption. This last piece is possible because the office of land use and climate innovation (LCI) maintains a “site check” mapping tool that identifies, among other variables, areas of the state that meet the very-low VMT threshold.

A search of CEQAnet, the statewide database of CEQA documents, shows that the AB 1449 CEQA exemption for affordable infill housing has been used 10 times since it became the law in 2023, with almost all of these uses occurring in 2026. This demonstrates that the AB 1449 criteria, which now apply to university and college housing under AB 1732, are useable.

DOUBLE REFERRAL:

If this measure is approved by the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, the do pass motion must include the action to re-refer the bill to the Senate Housing Committee.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1449 (Alvarez, Chapter 761, Statutes of 2023) exempts from CEQA, until 2033, the planning, funding, and development of affordable housing projects, as defined, that meet specified location and labor requirements established in AB 2011.

SB 312 (Weiner, Chapter 284, Statutes of 2024. relaxes several conditions attached to the CEQA exemption for public university housing projects established by SB 886 (Wiener) in 2022.

SB 886 (Wiener,, Chapter 663, Statutes of 2022) provided a CEQA exemption until January 1, 2030, for certain UC, CSU, and CCC faculty, staff, and student housing projects if they meet certain environmental standards.

AB 130 (Chapter 22, Statutes of 2025) creates a CEQA exemption for a housing development project (i.e., projects where at least two-thirds of the square footage is residential) that is up to 20 acres and in an infill area and not located on a sensitive site.

SUPPORT:

21st Century Alliance
Abundant Housing L.a.
Abundant Housing Los Angeles
Bay Area Council
California Apartment Association
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
California Faculty Association
California School Employees Association
California Yimby
Circulate Planning & Policy
City of Gilroy Council Member Zach Hilton
City of Monterey Park
Davis College Democrats
Fieldstead and Company, INC.

Housing Action Coalition
San Diego Housing Commission
San Diego Housing Federation
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
San Francisco Bay Area Planning & Urban Research Association (SPUR)
Spur
Student Homes At Sjsu
Student Homes At UCLA
Student Homes At UCSB
Student Homes At UCSD
Student Homes Coalition
The Two Hundred
The Two Hundred for Homeownership
University of California
Youthbridge Housing

OPPOSITION:

None received

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