

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Matt Haney, Chair

AB 1738 (Carrillo) – As Amended March 16, 2026

SUBJECT: State Housing Law: remote inspections

SUMMARY: Requires a city, county, or city and county (local jurisdiction) to establish a remote virtual building inspection (RVI) program for residential scopes of work by July 1, 2027.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires a local jurisdiction to offer homeowners and contractors the option of requesting RVIs, with the inspection conducted offsite and the homeowner using videoconferencing or recorded media, for the entirety, or a subset, of the inspections required by a building permit for the following scopes of work by July 1, 2027:
 - a) Residential water heaters;
 - b) Residential heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems (HVAC);
 - c) Residential reroofs;
 - d) Minor residential electrical work;
 - e) Residential plumbing work;
 - f) Photovoltaic and energy storage systems;
 - g) Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors;
 - h) Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and junior accessory dwelling units (JADUs) under 800 square feet; and
 - i) Home hardening and defensible space.
- 2) Requires a local jurisdiction to offer homeowners and contractors the option of requesting remote building inspections for the following scopes of work, subject to the discretion of the local construction inspector, by July 1, 2027:
 - a) Drywall;
 - b) Exterior siding;
 - c) Insulation;
 - d) Signs;
 - e) Window replacements;
 - f) Light foundation and footings;

- g) Fireplace inserts;
 - h) Patios or decks;
 - i) Temporary power poles;
 - j) Demolition;
 - k) Removing gas lines;
 - l) Residential additions under 800 square feet; and
 - m) Storage sheds under 800 square feet.
- 3) Limits the provisions of 1) and 2) to single-family units and duplexes.
 - 4) Allows local jurisdictions to keep a digital record of the remote inspection for later review, training, or compliance.
 - 5) Allows a local construction inspector to exercise discretion to conduct future inspections required by a building permit remotely or in person if a homeowner or contractor fails a prior remote inspection associated with that permit.
 - 6) Requires the option for remote inspection to be available at no greater cost and with no greater delay than an in-person inspection.
 - 7) Applies all liabilities and immunities for local jurisdictions and their employees to remote inspections.
 - 8) Allows a local jurisdiction to, at its discretion, establish an audit process to confirm that a homeowner or contractor accurately represented the work that is subject to the remote inspection. Allows a local jurisdiction to temporarily ban the homeowner or contractor from using a remote inspection if the homeowner is found to have willfully misrepresented the work that was subject to the inspection. Further allows a local government to enter into agreements with other local jurisdictions to enforce their temporary homeowner or contractor bans.
 - 9) Requires a local jurisdiction to include information on the local RVI programs in its annual progress reports (APRs) submitted to HCD. The APR must include the number of inspections for different permit scopes conducted remotely and in person, the failure rates of each inspection, and the number of audits conducted of remote inspections for different types of permits.
 - 10) Makes findings and declarations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Allows cities and counties to “make and enforce within its limits, all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.” (California Constitution, Article XI, Section 7)

- 2) Establishes State Housing Law to assure the availability of affordable housing and uniform statewide code enforcement to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and occupants of housing and accessory buildings. (Health & Safety Code (HSC) 17910 - 17998.3)
- 3) Establishes the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC) within the Department of General Services, which requires CBSC to approve and adopt building standards and codify those standards in the California Building Standards Code. (HSC 18930)
- 4) Authorizes any officer, employee, or agent of an enforcement agency to enter and inspect any building or premises whenever necessary to secure compliance with, or prevent violation of, State Housing Law, the California Building Standards Code, and other rules and regulations. (HSC 17970)
- 5) Requires the building department of a local government to complete inspections of permitted residential work for projects containing 1-10 residential units that are no more than 40' tall within 10 business days of receiving notice of completion. (HSC 17970.3)
- 6) Allows the governing body of any county or city, including a charter city, to prescribe fees for permits, certificates, or other forms or documents required or authorized by State Housing Law or rules and regulations adopted pursuant to State Housing Law, and prohibits these fees from exceeding the amount reasonably required to administer or process these permits, certificates, or other forms or documents, or to defray the costs of enforcement required by State Housing Law to be carried out by local enforcement agencies, as specified. (HSC 17951)
- 7) Requires, if the local enforcement agency fails to conduct an inspection of permitted work for which permit fees have been charged pursuant to 6), above, within 60 days of receiving notice of the completion of the permitted work, the permittee to be entitled to reimbursement of the permit fees. The local enforcement agency shall disclose in clear language on each permit or on a document that accompanies the permit that the permittee may be entitled to reimbursement of permit fees. (HSC 17951)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: According to the author, "Like many of you, I'm a homeowner, and have also experienced the frustration of waiting weeks for an inspection on a simple home renovation. Even once the inspection date is booked, a routine inspection that only takes 15 minutes can take hours, forcing homeowners to take a day off work and a day of lost pay. Even beyond the money lost from missing work, the cost of delaying these inspections can also cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars.

AB 1738 proposes an alternative to this, by giving homeowners the choice to request a remote virtual inspection for simple home renovations. These remote inspections are already happening throughout the state; 19 different jurisdictions already offer some form of remote inspections. This bill will require local jurisdictions to allow remote virtual inspections upon request for simple renovations. This is a simple, commonsense affordability measure that will help homeowners save time and money. "

State Housing Law: Prior to 1962, the Legislature established minimum building requirements for dwellings in statutory form, and these requirements only applied to incorporated cities, unless a county voluntarily adopted them. In 1962, the Legislature enacted State Housing Law, which provides requirements and procedures for uniform statewide code enforcement to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and occupants of housing and accessory buildings. Among other things, State Housing Law delegates responsibility to state administrative agencies for the adoption of building standards, applies state building codes uniformly, and directs local agencies' administration of code enforcement.

Building Codes: The California Building Standards Code contains building standards and regulations as adopted by the CBSC. These standards include, among other requirements, structural standards for building safety (the Building Code), fire safety standards (the Fire Code), energy efficiency standards (the Energy Code), and standards for green buildings (CalGreen).

The CBSC updates the Building Standards Code on a three-year cycle. Once adopted at the state level, cities and counties are required to adopt the Building Standards Code by ordinance, typically to make local administrative provisions or amendments, but they generally cannot modify state building standards unless they make express findings based on local climatic, geological, or topographical conditions. New construction and improvements to existing buildings must comply with the current building codes, and improvements to an existing building may trigger additional code upgrades for other parts of the building. In 2025, the housing budget trailer bill (AB 130 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 22, Statutes of 2025) paused the adoption of most new or amended residential building standards by the CBSC until June 1, 2031, effectively freezing the residential building code during that period except for emergency health and safety standards, wildfire requirements, climate resilience measures as part of an adopted greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy, and other limited statutory updates required by state or federal law.

Existing law requires the building department of every city or county to enforce the provisions of the State Housing Law, the California Building Standards Code, and the other specified rules and regulations promulgated pursuant to the State Housing Law.

Housing Approval Process: Planning for, and approving, new housing developments is primarily a local responsibility. Under the California Constitution, cities and counties have broad authority, known as the police power, to regulate land use in the interest of public health, safety, and welfare. Local governments enforce this authority through an entitlement process, which includes both discretionary and ministerial approvals. Gaining "entitlement" is essentially a local government's confirmation that a housing project conforms to all applicable local zoning regulations and design standards. For discretionary projects, environmental review under CEQA is often required as part of the entitlement process. CEQA can influence project design, add mitigation requirements, or delay approval if significant environmental impacts are identified.

Once a project receives entitlement, or approval, from the local planning department, it must obtain postentitlement permits, such as building, demolition, and grading permits. Postentitlement permits are related to the physical construction of the development proposal before construction can begin.

Residential Construction Inspections: Once permits are issued and construction begins, the construction phase involves a separate layer of local government oversight through building inspections. These inspections ensure that the actual construction work complies with approved

plans, building codes, and safety regulations. Local agency inspectors review critical aspects of construction and various scopes of work, such as structural components, electrical and plumbing systems, fire safety measures, energy efficiency, and accessibility requirements at multiple stages of the project. Inspections occur throughout construction, from foundation and framing through final inspection and issuance of a certificate of occupancy, ensuring building safety and compliance with the approved set of plans.

In 2025, the Legislature enacted AB 1308 (Hoover), Chapter 509, Statutes of 2025, to ensure timely building inspections for smaller residential projects. The bill requires local building departments to conduct a building inspection within 10 business days of receiving notice that permitted work is completed for certain small-scale residential construction projects, defined as buildings with one to ten units that are up to 40 feet tall. AB 1308 applies to building permits issued for both new construction of, and residential additions to, these smaller residential projects. If a local agency fails to meet the statutory inspection deadline, the delay constitutes a violation of the Housing Accountability Act. AB 1308 was intended to provide greater certainty and inspection expediency during the construction phase for smaller residential development projects.

Even with relatively quick inspection turnaround times, stakeholders still note inefficiencies with the inspection process. Routine inspections often require contractors to schedule a visit and have workers available on site, which can involve administrative coordination and potential standby time while waiting for inspectors to arrive. In some cases, stakeholders also note that smaller-scale projects or alterations may be built without permits, particularly when the scope of work is perceived as minor to the homeowner or contractor, or when applicants seek to avoid the time, fees, or scheduling coordination associated with the permitting and inspection process. When work proceeds without permits, it occurs outside the formal inspection framework, meaning the building department does not review the construction for compliance with applicable codes or approved plans, potentially resulting in unsafe conditions for the future occupants of the building.

This bill's findings reference a 2022 City of Palo Alto audit, which identified aspects of the building permitting and inspection process that may affect overall timelines. The audit noted that inspection lead times could be as long as approximately two weeks between the time an inspection is requested and when it occurs, and identified inspections as one of several steps in the broader permitting process that contribute to project delays. The audit also included recommendations to improve process efficiency and permit tracking. As context, the audit reflects conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many jurisdictions were experiencing staffing constraints and operational disruptions. Stakeholders indicate that inspection timelines may have improved in some jurisdictions since then, and that inspection turnaround times can vary across jurisdictions.

Remote Virtual Inspections (RVIs): Remote Virtual Inspections (RVIs) allow building inspectors to review permitted construction work without being physically present at the jobsite. Instead, the inspection is conducted using video, photographs, or similar technology while a contractor, property owner, or other representative is present at the site and follows the inspector's directions, or records media to be sent to the inspector. RVIs do not establish a different legal standard of inspection, but rather a different method for conducting an inspection required under existing building and safety laws.

National organizations have issued guidance and best practices related to the use of RVIs, although these materials generally do not create binding requirements for local building departments. The International Code Council (ICC) has published *Recommended Practices for Remote Virtual Inspections*, which describes procedural considerations such as verifying permit status, ensuring adequate connectivity and visibility, maintaining appropriate documentation, and recording inspection results in the jurisdiction's permit-tracking system. The document states that it is provided for informational purposes and does not supersede building codes or local policies. Further, as the bill's findings note, the ICC's best practices provide that "all inspections may qualify for an RVI, depending on the authority having jurisdiction's resources and policies." Similarly, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has published guidance outlining administrative and technical considerations for RVIs, such as determining which inspection types are appropriate for remote review, addressing safety considerations, and establishing procedures for documentation and technology use. These materials are framed as best practices and guidance rather than enforceable standards. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has also issued program guidance allowing remote video inspections for units using the federal Housing Choice Voucher program for purposes of conducting Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections, which assess habitability and safety conditions, not general construction inspections. The guidance directs public housing agencies to develop their own procedures while ensuring proper documentation and verification.

The use of RVIs expanded in some jurisdictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, when local governments adopted remote options to maintain inspection services while limiting in-person contact. Some jurisdictions have continued to offer RVIs following the pandemic, while others have returned primarily to in-person inspections.

Approximately 19 out of the 540 jurisdictions in California currently allow some use of RVIs for portions of their inspection workload. For example, the City of Sacramento offers virtual inspections for certain residential permits, including minor HVAC work, water heater replacement, solar photovoltaic systems, EV charger installations, and some reroof inspections. Other jurisdictions, such as Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, and Placer County, similarly allow remote inspections for eligible permits at the discretion of the local building inspector. Los Angeles County offers RVIs for the insulation inspection for new construction ADUs, while requiring in-person inspections for the remaining construction phases.

In practice, the types of work most commonly inspected remotely tend to be relatively standardized inspection types, including limited-scope mechanical, electrical, or plumbing work; solar installations; minor equipment replacements; and re-inspections. More complex inspections, such as those involving structural work, foundations, framing, or projects requiring detailed field verification, are generally still conducted in person in most cases.

Other states have also authorized the use of remote inspections in statute or policy. Florida allows enforcement agencies to conduct virtual inspections for certain projects, including some new construction, while prohibiting their use for structural inspections on large "threshold" buildings. Some local jurisdictions in Arizona and Texas have implemented similar programs that allow remote inspections for defined residential scopes of work, such as water heaters, electrical service upgrades, or minor plumbing repairs. These examples illustrate how RVIs have been successfully adopted in other states, generally for limited-scope inspections, while more complex inspections continue to occur through in-person site visits.

This Bill: This bill requires local jurisdictions to offer the option of remote building inspections for certain residential projects and establishes related reporting requirements. Specifically, this bill requires, by July 1, 2027, that a city, county, or city and county, including charter cities, offer homeowners or contractors the option to request an RVI conducted offsite using videoconferencing or recorded photos and videos for inspections associated with building permits for single- and two-family dwelling units.

This bill requires remote inspection to be available for certain types of work, including:

- Residential heaters and HVAC systems
- Residential reroofs
- Minor electrical work (such as service panels, rewiring, whole-house fans, ceiling fans, and new circuits)
- Residential plumbing work (including sewer repair or replacement, replumbing, and fixture replacement)
- Photovoltaic and energy storage systems
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- ADUs or JADUs units under 800 square feet
- Home hardening and defensible space improvements, including work to comply with the California Wildland-Urban Interface Code

This bill also requires the local government to offer RVIs for certain scopes of work, at the discretion of the construction inspector. These include RVIs for: drywall, siding, insulation, window replacements, light foundations and footings, fireplace inserts, patios or decks, demolition, removing gas lines, temporary power poles, residential additions under 800 square feet, and storage sheds under 800 square feet.

This bill further requires that these RVIs be offered at no greater cost and with no greater delay than in-person inspections. It allows jurisdictions to maintain digital records of remote inspections and authorizes local agencies to conduct onsite audits to confirm that work shown during a remote inspection was accurately represented. If a homeowner or contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work, a jurisdiction may temporarily prohibit that individual from using remote inspections, and other local governments may similarly ban that homeowner or contractor from using RVIs in their jurisdiction.

Finally, this bill would add reporting requirements, beginning in 2028 APR that local governments complete and send to HCD, that would provide data regarding whether local jurisdictions have implemented a remote inspection program consistent with the provisions of this bill. The APR would also include data regarding the number of inspections conducted remotely and in person, failure rates for each, and the number of audits conducted by the local government.

Policy Considerations: The Committee may wish to consider the following policy considerations:

- 1) **Scope and Scale:** According to the author, approximately 19 of the state's 540 jurisdictions currently offer some form of RVIs, often on a limited basis or at the discretion of the local construction inspector. The Committee may wish to consider the potential operational

impacts of requiring all jurisdictions to offer RVIs across a broad scope of residential inspection types by July 1, 2027.

- 2) Application to ADUs. This bill would require remote inspection availability for new construction ADUs and JADUs that are less than 800 square feet. ADUs represent approximately 1 in 5 new homes built in the state, largely as a result of successful state policy to streamline the permitting of these unit typologies. While they benefit from a streamlined approvals process, they are still new construction housing units that must comply with all building codes and meet criteria for all habitable units.

ADU developments can vary widely in complexity, ranging from simple, single-story prefabricated units to more complex, multi-story structures with greater structural and systems requirements. A typical ADU project requires multiple inspections, often five or more, throughout construction. This bill seeks to expedite those through RVIs. These inspections generally include foundation (footing and slab), structural framing, building systems (electrical, plumbing, and mechanical), insulation and energy compliance, and final inspection.

The Committee may wish to consider whether mandating RVIs for all inspections related to ADUs, from foundation to framing to electrical work, is appropriate at this time, given that the majority of the California jurisdictions currently offering RVIs do not often include all inspections for new construction of habitable space in their existing remote inspection programs. This bill currently places other types of remote inspections associated with new habitable space, like additions to existing buildings up to 800 square feet, in the optional/discretionary category.

- 3) RVI Inspection Method. As currently written, this bill allows the homeowner or contractor to choose whether a remote inspection is conducted through live videoconferencing or recorded photos and videos. The Committee may wish to consider whether that determination should instead be made by the local building department or construction inspector.
- 4) Relationship with Existing Guidance. This bill is informed in part by guidance from the ICC regarding remote inspections, which states that “all inspections may qualify for an RVI, depending on the authority having jurisdiction’s resources and policies.” The ICC notes that its guidance is intended for informational purposes and does not supersede adopted building codes or local inspection policies. The Committee may wish to consider how this bill’s requirements interact with local building department practices and code enforcement authority.
- 5) Enforcement of Contractor Bans. This bill allows jurisdictions to temporarily prohibit homeowners or contractors from using remote inspections if they are found to have willfully misrepresented work during a remote inspection and authorizes jurisdictions to enter into agreements to enforce those bans. The Committee may wish to consider how such bans would be communicated, tracked, and enforced across jurisdictions in practice.
- 6) Magnitude of the Problem. Existing law generally requires inspections associated with building permits to occur within 10 business days of completion of work for small residential projects, and some jurisdictions report shorter inspection timeframes. The Committee may wish to consider how consistently inspection timelines affect project delivery across

jurisdictions, and whether expanding the use of RVIs would address any identified constraints.

Arguments in Support: SPUR and Permit Power, the bill co-sponsors, write in support: “California faces an urgent housing affordability crisis and an equally urgent need to accelerate climate resilience and clean energy deployment. Outdated permitting and inspection processes—particularly long wait times for routine inspections that take 5-15 minutes—are quietly but significantly driving up costs, slowing new housing production, and delaying clean energy upgrades for California families.

Remote inspections are a proven, cost-effective solution. RVIs allow building inspectors to conduct inspections using live video, recorded video, or photos for eligible projects such as water heaters, HVAC systems, solar and battery installations, minor electrical and plumbing work, ADUs, and re-inspections. These inspections maintain full safety and code compliance while reducing unnecessary travel, scheduling inefficiencies, and backlogs.

Remote inspections are already working across California. At least 19 jurisdictions, small and large—including Los Angeles County, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Berkeley, Santa Rosa, and Placer County—use RVIs for portions of their inspection workload. Statewide and national authorities, including the International Code Council, HUD, and the National Fire Protection Association, have issued standards and best practices supporting their use. Other states, including Texas and Florida, have authorized or required remote inspections in statute.

This is a crucial tool if California wants to meet its electrification and housing construction goals. RVIs remove friction at critical bottlenecks for electrification and renewable energy projects, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and help accelerate deployment of heat pumps, solar, and resilience retrofits.”

Arguments in Opposition: California Building Officials (CALBO) writes in opposition: “Some building departments have made routine use of remote and virtual inspections. We commend their approach in finding ways to make innovative practices work for their community. We routinely share their practices with our larger membership and commend their work, but that does not mean that it is a proverbial *fit* for all communities. As one member of our Board cited, when it comes to a virtual inspection via FaceTime, it’s not what the contractor *is* showing you, it is what they are **not** showing outside of the camera view. It simply means that building departments need discretion with how remote and virtual inspections are offered. Making the permitting and inspection process more arbitrary, or a “box” to check, is not going to net in an increase in requested services as outlined within AB 1738. It simply diminishes the process of inspection and the life-safety role of the code official.

There is nothing to prohibit a local building department from moving forward with remote or virtual inspections without mandate. We appreciate the guidelines offered by the International Code Council (ICC) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and routinely encourage our members to reference these materials. As CALBO, we are not anti-remote inspection. Rather, we feel that a one-size fits all approach to inspection services is a disservice to 40 million+ diverse Californians and the local building departments that provide public safety services on their behalf.”

Committee Amendments: The Committee may wish to consider the following amendments:

- 1) Amending the required virtual inspections scope for ADUs as follows:

(8) All inspections for the permitting of accessory dwelling units or junior accessory dwelling units under 800 square feet, **except for inspections related to the following:**
(a) Foundation, including but not limited to, rebar reinforcement, anchor bolts, soil preparation, trench depth, and utility placement

(b) Framing, including but not limited to wall and roof

- 2) Deleting commercial reroofs from the scope of work of required RVIs:

(3) Residential ~~and commercial~~ reroofs.

- 3) Adding the word “minor” before “residential plumbing work:”

(5) **Minor** residential plumbing work, including all of the following:

- 4) Giving the local construction inspector the ability to determine whether the RVI will occur via videoconferencing or recorded photos and videos, rather than the homeowner, and providing that either the homeowner or contractor can be the one virtually meeting with the local construction inspector:

(2) The remote inspection shall be conducted offsite, with the homeowner or contractor using one of the following methods, at the discretion of the local construction inspector:

(A) Videoconferencing

(B) Recorded photos and videos

Related Legislation:

AB 1308 (Hoover), Chapter 509, Statutes of 2025 required building permit inspections for residential projects containing 1-10 dwelling units to be completed in 10 business days.

Double-Referred: This bill was also referred to the Assembly Committee on Local Government, where it will be heard should it pass out of this Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Permit Power (Co-Sponsor)
 SPUR (Co-Sponsor)
 350 Bay Area Action
 350 Humboldt: Grass Roots Climate Action
 Abundant Housing LA
 Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet
 Activesgv
 All-electric California
 California Climate Action
 California YIMBY
 Casita Coalition
 City of Pico Rivera

Cleanearth4kids.org

Climate Resolve

Fresnans Against Fracking

Housing Action Coalition

Menlo Spark

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Redwood Energy

San Francisco Bay Area Planning & Urban Research Association (SPUR)

Santa Cruz Climate Action Network

South Pasadena Residents for Responsible Growth

The Climate Center

The Two Hundred

Opposition

California Building Officials

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