



administer or process these permits, certificates, or other forms or documents, or to defray the costs of enforcement required by SHL to be carried out by local enforcement agencies, as specified.

- 6) Requires, if the local enforcement agency fails to conduct an inspection of permitted work for which permit fees have been charged pursuant to 5), 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.

**This bill:**

- 1) Defines “local agency” to mean a city, including a charter city, county, or city and county.
- 2) “Qualifying city or county” means a city with a population of 50,000 or fewer, but not fewer than 5,000, of which 6) below applies.
- 3) Requires a local agency to offer a homeowner or contractor the option of requesting an RVI for all or a subset of inspections required by a building permit for any of the following projects in single- or two-family dwelling units:
  - a) Residential heat pump water heaters, including the alteration, extension, or replacement of components of an existing electrical system to support the installation of a heat pump water heater.
    - i. As part of the electrical work appurtenant to the installation of the residential heat pump water heater, the local agency shall not be required to allow for RVIs of new or upgraded main electrical services as part of the included scope, but may at their discretion elect to remotely inspect new electrical service installations in support of residential heat pump water heater installations.
  - b) Subject to the discretion of the inspector, residential heat pump heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems (HVAC), including the alteration, extension, or replacement of components of an existing electrical system to support the installation of a heat pump HVAC system.
    - i. As part of the electrical work appurtenant to the installation of the residential heat pump HVAC system, the local agency shall not be required

to allow for RVIs of new or upgraded main electrical services as part of the included scope, but may at their discretion elect to remotely inspect new electrical service installations in support of residential heat pump HVAC system installations.

- c) Residential reroofs.
  - d) Photovoltaic and energy storage systems.
  - e) Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- 4) Requires a remote inspection to 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.
  - 5) Requires that, if a local agency requires an RVI, the contractor must disclose to the homeowner that the inspection is required to be conducted remotely.
  - 6) Provides that this bill shall not apply to any city with a population of fewer than 5,000 people, or a county of fewer than 150,000 people, including each city within that county.
  - 7) Requires a local agency that is a qualifying city or county shall satisfy the requirements of 3) and 4) by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2028.
  - 8) Requires a local agency that is not a qualifying city or county shall satisfy the requirements of 3) and 4) by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2028.
  - 9) Allows a local agency to keep a digital record of the RVI conducted for later review, training, or compliance.
  - 10) A local agency may adopt reasonable protocols governing the technical conduct of an RVI, including protocol to ensure the following:
    - a) The inspector is able to adequately observe the work that is the subject of the inspection, including that the field of view, image quality, or camera coverage is sufficient to verify compliance with applicable building standards.

- b) The work shown in an RVI is the actual work performed under the building permit, at the permitted location, and the video or photo inspection begins at the street, clearly showing the property address at the front of the building or proof of location.
  - c) The technology and broadband connectivity used during an RVI are sufficient for the inspector to reliably observe and verify the work.
- 11) Provides that if a homeowner or contractor fails an RVI required by a building permit, a construction inspector may, at their discretion, conduct future inspections required by that building permit remotely or in person.
- a) This section shall not be construed to limit, supersede, or otherwise abridge the authority of a construction inspector, after attempting to verify compliance with applicable codes and regulations via an RVI, to terminate the inspection and require that the inspection be conducted in-person.
- 12) Provides a local agency shall offer an RVI at no greater cost and with no greater delay than an in-person inspection.
- 13) All liabilities and immunities, as specified, applicable to local agencies and their employees shall apply to a remote inspection.
- 14) If a homeowner or contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work that is the subject of an RVI, a city, including a local agency, may temporarily ban the homeowner or contractor from using an RVI for a period of time determined by the city or county, not to exceed 6 months for the first offense and 12 months for offenses thereafter.
- 15) Allows a local agency to enter into agreements with other local agencies to enforce each other's temporary homeowner or contractor bans.
- 16) Provides that nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit a local agency from adopting or implementing RVIs in a manner more permissive, or allowing additional types of building permits to be inspected remotely, than provided in this section.

## **Background**

*State Housing Law (SHL)*. 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 SHL, 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, SHL 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—the CBSC published new standards that went into effect on January 1, 2026. Once adopted at the state level, cities and counties in California then enact an ordinance to adopt the codes. 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 a building. City and county building departments enforce the provisions of the SHL, the California Building Standards Code, and local zoning codes that specify the allowable forms and uses of buildings within a city or county's jurisdiction. Within building departments, the positions responsible for evaluating building permits for compliance include building officials, inspectors, plan checkers, and civil engineers. SHL also allows local agencies to hire private entities on a temporary basis to perform plan checking services. Some agencies contract out a portion of their workload during busy times, or certain portions of the building permit review process, such as reviewing compliance with energy efficiency requirements. Other local agencies contract out nearly all plan checking functions to a private firm.

## Comments

- 1) *Author's statement.* “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.”

- 2) *Balancing priorities.* Proponents of the bill outline several benefits of expanding the use of RVIs throughout the state. First, they describe the accrual of costs associated with long wait times resulting from overburdened local building departments. When a building department has many requests backlogged, what could otherwise be a simple and efficient inspection process may become unnecessarily prolonged. Furthermore, some jurisdictions are very geographically spread out. As a result, it may take building inspectors hours to travel from one job site to another, resulting in even longer wait times the day of the inspection. Proponents of this bill identify RVIs as a way to combat these trends—providing building inspectors with a way to remotely and efficiently inspect residential dwellings with fewer delays. They also state that RVIs are beneficial not only for reducing emissions by cutting down vehicle travel between job sites, but also by making it easier, faster, and cheaper for Californians to install greener technology permitted by this bill, such as heat pump HVAC and water heater systems.

There are also some risks to RVIs. For example, opponents of this bill allege that conducting inspections remotely could jeopardize the ability of inspectors to interpret otherwise critical sensory data (*e.g.*, smell or sound) that could inform whether the installation of equipment was done properly. Additionally, with artificial intelligence rapidly advancing with limited safeguards, it’s not clear what protections are in place within building departments to identify and prevent manipulated inspection documents. Live videoconferencing technology may be a good antidote to this problem, but this bill does not specifically embed safeguards for these potential risks outside of allowing photos and videos to be accepted at the discretion of the building inspector. While this bill includes delayed implementation for smaller jurisdictions and excludes the smallest jurisdictions entirely, it’s not clear whether local building departments of varying sizes have the capacity to develop the expertise and resources necessary to adopt RVIs in a responsible manner in the time allotted.

**To balance safety and efficiency, the committee may wish to consider amending the bill to cap the power capacity of photovoltaic systems required to be subject to an RVI at 15kW.**

- 3) *Different levels of adoption.* During the COVID-19 pandemic, cities and counties explored alternative ways of performing inspections to preserve public health. Some jurisdictions adopted RVIs, which allowed building inspectors to

review permitted construction work without being physically present at the jobsite. The inspections were conducted using visual technology while a contractor, property owner, or other representative was present and followed the inspector's directions, or recorded media to be sent to the inspector.

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. In 2020, the International Code Council (ICC) 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. This guidance states that it is provided for informational purposes and does not supersede building codes or local 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.

Some jurisdictions have continued to offer RVIs following the pandemic, while the vast majority use in-person inspections for residential units. Only 19 out of the 540 cities and counties 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 and Santa Rosa similarly allow remote inspections for eligible permits at the discretion of the local building inspector. Los Angeles County offers RVIs for reroofs, roof top solar photovoltaic system and energy storage systems, some water heaters, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Additional inspection types are offered virtually at the discretion of the building inspector. However, Los Angeles County's guidance on the program specifies that "project complexity or any other circumstances... may inhibit the RVI, making it unsuitable for the project. Consequently, an RVI is not guaranteed, and inspectors may require in-person inspection of any portion or phase of a project." Ultimately, the local building inspector is responsible for making those kinds of discretionary decisions.

This bill would require statewide, with limited exceptions, local building departments' acceptance of RVIs for a subset of residential building inspections

when a homeowner, or contractor with their consent, requests one. This would significantly advance the uptake of RVIs throughout the state.

4) *Incoming!* This bill was heard in the Local Government Committee on June 17<sup>th</sup>, where it received a 4-1 vote.

**Related/Prior Legislation**

**AB 1308 (Hoover, Chapter 509, Statutes of 2025)** — required a building department to conduct an inspection of the permitted work for specified new residential constructions of a building and residential additions to an existing building within 10 business days of receiving a notice of the completion of the permitted work authorized by a building permit issued for those projects.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No    Fiscal Com.: Yes    Local: Yes

**POSITIONS:** (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026.)

**SUPPORT:**

- Permit Power (Co-Sponsor)
- Spur (Co-Sponsor)
- 350 Humboldt: Grass Roots Climate Action
- Abundant Housing Los Angeles
- Advanced Energy United
- California Apartment Association
- California Yimby
- Casita Coalition
- Central City Association of Los Angeles
- City of Baldwin Park
- City of Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee
- City of Pomona, Mayor Tim Sandoval
- Community Action to Fight Asthma
- Councilmember Ben Bartlett, Berkeley
- Devin Murphy, Mayor Pro Tempore, City of Pinole
- Habitat for Humanity California
- Housing Action Coalition
- Igor Tregub, Vice Mayor, City of Berkeley
- Los Angeles City Council, District 1, Eunisses Hernandez
- Los Angeles County Supervisor, Lindsey Horvath
- Oakland City Councilmember Janani Ramachandran
- Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath

Rebecca Saltzman, El Cerrito Councilmember  
Salvador Melendez, City of Montebello, Councilmember  
Terry Taplin, Council Member City of Berkeley  
The Two Hundred for Homeownership  
Zac Unger, City of Oakland Councilmember

**OPPOSITION:**

California Building Officials  
California State Association of Electrical Workers  
California State Pipe Trades Council  
City of Brentwood  
City of LA Verne  
City of Thousand Oaks  
League of California Cities  
Town of Truckee  
Western States Council Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation

**-- END --**