
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1738
Author: Carrillo (D), et al.
Amended: 7/2/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE: 4-1, 6/17/26

AYES: Durazo, Arreguín, Cervantes, Laird

NOES: Seyarto

NO VOTE RECORDED: Choi, Ashby

SENATE HOUSING COMMITTEE: 7-2, 6/30/26

AYES: Arreguín, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cortese, Durazo, Grayson, Padilla

NOES: Seyarto, Ochoa Bogh

NO VOTE RECORDED: Gonzalez

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 62-0, 5/22/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State Housing Law: remote inspections

SOURCE: Permit Power,
SPUR

DIGEST: This bill requires cities and counties to offer a homeowner or contractor the option of a remote virtual inspection for specified projects in single- or two-family dwelling units.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes State Housing Law (SHL) to ensure uniform statewide code enforcement to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and occupants of housing and accessory buildings.

- 2) Establishes the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC) within the Department of General Services. Requires CBSC to adopt building standards and codify those standards in the California Building Standards Code.
- 3) 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, SHL, the California Building Standards Code, and other rules and regulations.
- 4) Requires local building departments to complete inspections of permitted residential work for 1- to 10-unit residential projects that are no more than 40' tall within 10 business days of receiving notice of completion.
- 5) 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 SHL or rules and regulations adopted pursuant to SHL 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 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) Requires a city or county to offer a homeowner or contractor the option of requesting a Remote Virtual Inspection (RVI) for 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 systems with an alternating current nameplate rating less than or equal to 15 kilowatts and energy storage systems.
 - e) Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- 2) 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.
 - 3) 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.
 - 4) Exempts a city with a population of fewer than 5,000 people, or a county with a population of fewer than 150,00 people, and each city within those counties.

- 5) Requires a city or county with a population of greater than 50,000 to comply with the bill's requirements by January 1, 2028. Other cities and counties (except those that are exempt) have an additional six months to comply.
- 6) Requires a city or county to offer a remote inspection at no greater cost and with no greater delay than in-person inspection. It allows local agencies to adopt reasonable protocols governing the technical conduct of an RVI, including to ensure that:
 - a) The inspector is able to adequately observe the work that is the subject of the RVI, as specified;
 - b) The work shown in the 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; and
 - c) The technology and broadband connectivity used during the RVI are sufficient for the inspector to reliably observe and verify the work.
- 7) Allows, if a homeowner or contractor fails an RVI, a construction inspector to, at their discretion, conduct future inspections required by that building permit remotely or in person. The bill also provides that it does not limit, supersede, or otherwise abridge the authority of a construction inspector, after they have attempted to verify compliance with applicable codes and regulations, to terminate that remote inspection and require that the inspection be conducted in person.
- 8) Allows a city or county, if the homeowner or contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work that is the subject of an RVI, to temporarily ban the homeowner or contractor from using RVIs for up to 6 months for the first offense and 12 months for subsequent offenses.
- 9) Applies specified liability protection for cities and counties and their employees to RVIs and includes findings and declarations to support its purposes.
- 10) Allows a city or county to adopt or implement remote inspections in a manner more permissive, or allowing additional types of building permits to be inspected remotely, than provided in the bill.

Background

Building inspections. Once the building 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 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 to final issuance of a certificate of occupancy, ensuring building safety and compliance with the approved set of plans at every step.

Remote Virtual Inspections (RVIs). During the COVID-19 pandemic, cities and counties explored alternative ways of performing inspection to preserve public health. Some jurisdictions adopted “Remote Virtual Inspections” (RVIs), which 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.

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 cities and counties in California currently allow some use of RVIs for portions of their inspection workload.

Research by SPUR argues that the current system that generally requires in-person inspection increases costs for homeowners. SPUR notes that the total number of inspections of single family homes ranges from 110,000 to 200,000 a year in California. SPUR interviewed heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) contractors for the project, who reported waiting 2 to 6 hours for inspections that take 5 to 15 minutes. This wait time drives costs of \$600 to \$1,000 per inspection. SPUR argues that RVIs:

- Reduce travel costs and environmental impacts and free up time for building inspectors to focus on new construction;

- Accelerate the clean energy transition by reducing costs and delays when installing a heat pump water heater or HVAC, upgrading electrical panels, or installing solar panels;
- Reduce work backlogs, shorten permitting timelines, minimize disruptions at job sites, and lower renovation costs;
- Improve inspector safety; and
- Streamline disaster recovery by reducing permit delays, improving efficiency, and enabling faster rebuilding.

Clean energy advocates want the Legislature to require local agencies to adopt RVIs.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* 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.”

- 2) *Safety or convenience.* It is relatively clear that RVIs increase convenience for homeowners, contractors, and building officials when having permitted work inspected. Historically, however, the purpose of inspections has been to preserve public safety and hold contractors accountable to ensure that work performed on behalf of homeowners is done correctly. By removing the physical presence of a building inspector and limiting them to visual and audio means of inspecting, RVIs may not allow the same depth of investigation of the details of construction as an in-person inspection. For example, it may be more difficult for a building inspector to ensure that an electrical connection is tight absent physically touching it. This raises concerns that RVIs could result in

substandard work that may pose a safety hazard. AB 1738 lets homeowners and contractors, not building officials, determine when an RVI may be suitable for certain types of permits. A building official that identifies issues can request an in-person inspection, but the default remains remote. Supporters of the bill argue that there is no difference in safety between RVIs and in-person inspections, while building officials and local governments state that safety issues will go undiscovered. Is the convenience of RVIs worth the potential safety impacts?

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/4/26)

Permit Power (co-source)

SPUR (co-source)

Alexander Walker-griffin, Councilmember, City of Hercules

Ben Bartlett, Councilmember, City of Berkeley

City of El Monte, Mayor Pro Tem, Viviana Longoria

City of Oakland, Mayor Barbara Lee

Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez, First District, City of Los Angeles

Councilmember Terry Taplin, Berkeley

Devin Murphy, Mayor Pro Tempore, City of Pinole

Eunisses Hernandez, Councilmember, City of Los Angeles

Igor Tregub, Vice Mayor, City of Berkeley

Janani Ramachandran, Councilmember, City of Oakland

Lindsey P. Horvath, County Supervisor, Los Angeles County

Rebecca Saltzman, Councilmember, City of El Cerrito

Salvador Melendez, Councilmember, City of Montebello

Terry Taplin, Councilmember, City of Berkeley

Tim Sandoval, Mayor, City of Pomona

Victor Preciado, Councilmember, City of Pomona

Zac Unger, City of Oakland Councilmember

350 Bay Area Action

350 Conejo / San Fernando Valley

350 Humboldt County

350 South Bay Los Angeles

350 Southland Legislative Alliance

Abundant Housing Los Angeles

Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet

Activesgv

Advanced Energy United

All-electric California
Apartment Association of Orange County
California Apartment Association
California Center for Sustainable Energy
California Climate Action
California Environmental Voters
California Yimby
Casita Coalition
Central City Association of Los Angeles
City and County of San Francisco
City of Baldwin Park
City of Oakland
City of Pico Rivera
Clean Earth 4 Kids
Cleaneearth4kids.org
Climate Action California
Climate Resolve
Community Action to Fight Asthma
East Bay Rental Housing Association
East Bay Yimby
Fresnans Against Fracking
Grow the Richmond
Habitat for Humanity California
Healing and Justice Center
Housing Action Coalition
Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator
Los Angeles Climate Reality Project
Megafire Action
Menlo Spark
Mountain View Yimby
Napa-solano for Everyone
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Northern Neighbors Sf
Palisades Recovery Coalition
Peninsula for Everyone
Physicians for Social Responsibility - San Francisco Bay
Redwood Energy
Regional Asthma Management & Prevention
Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP)
San Diego Building Electrification Coalition

San Francisco Bay Area Planning & Urban Research Association (SPUR)
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
San Jose Yimby
San Mateo Forward
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
Santa Cruz Yimby
Santa Rosa Yimby
Sf Yimby
South Bay Yimby
South Pasadena Residents for Responsible Growth
Sustainable Claremont
The Climate Center
The Two Hundred for Homeownership
U.s. Green Building Council
Vector Green Power, LLC
Ventura County Yimby
Yes! in Redwood City
Yimby Action
Yimby Los Angeles
Yimby Monterey Peninsula
Yimby Slo
Zillow Group

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/4/26)

California Building Officials
City of Beverly Hills
City of Brentwood
City of La Verne
City of Thousand Oaks
League of California Cities

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 62-0, 5/22/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Michelle Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Tangipa, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Bauer-Kahan, Castillo, Chen, Connolly,
Davies, Gabriel, Gallagher, Irwin, Jackson, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ransom,
Celeste Rodriguez, Rogers, Schiavo, Ta, Valencia

Prepared by: Anton Favorini-Csorba / L. GOV. / (916) 651-4119
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