
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 518 (Ward) - Low-impact camping areas

Version: July 17, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 25, 2025

Policy Vote: HOUSING 9 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: AB 518 would explicitly exclude a “low-impact camping area,” as defined, from the definition of a special occupancy park (SOP) that is licensed and regulated by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping.

Fiscal Impact:

- HCD estimates it would incur approximately \$70,000 in one-time contracting costs to modify its administrative systems, and ongoing costs of approximately \$784,000 annually for 4.0 PY in staff time to handle an anticipated increase in requests for technical assistance from local jurisdictions regarding interpretation of the law to determine whether the existing sites and potential new sites are permitted by HCD or are exempt “low-impact camping areas.” HCD also anticipates workload for an increase in Mobilehome Assistance Center complaints, and an increase in requests for health and safety inspections. Staff assumes that requests for technical assistance would likely decline over several years. (General Fund)

Background: Existing law, the Mobilehome Parks Act (MPA) and Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA), specify requirements for the construction, maintenance, occupancy, use, and design of mobilehome parks and special occupancy parks (SOPs, such as RV parks). An SOP is any area of land or property that has at least two recreational vehicles, tents, camping cabins, and/or lots that are held out for rent or lease. HCD is responsible for developing regulations and enforcing statutory requirements to ensure the health and safety of residents of these occupancies. Minimum health and safety standards inside SOPs include regulations for construction, maintenance, occupancy, use, and design of SOPs, and are required to guarantee the safety of park occupants and ensure a decent environment for recreation or temporary occupancy. Enforcement actions include necessary inspections, permit issuance, and complaint response activities.

With HCD's approval, a city or county can assume enforcement responsibilities of the MPA and SOPA, as well as related regulations, within its jurisdiction. Existing law authorizes a local enforcement authority to relinquish the responsibility for parks in its jurisdiction, and also specifies a process for HCD to cancel a local entity's enforcement responsibilities if it is not effectively conducting its responsibilities, as specified. The processes for assuming, relinquishing, and cancelling local enforcement authority are specified in regulations.

Proposed Law: AB 518 would explicitly exclude a “low-impact camping area” from the definition of a special occupancy park, thereby exempting this designation of private

property for specified transit occupancy rental uses from the requirements of the SOPA. Specifically, this bill would define a “low-impact camping area” as any area of private property that provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation for recreational purposes that is not a commercial lodging facility. A low-impact camping area is not an SOP if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping and meets all of the following requirements:

- Provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation, not exceeding 14 consecutive nights per camper and not exceeding 28 nights per calendar year per camper.
- Includes no more than nine temporary sleeping accommodations, of which no more than four may be concurrently occupied by recreational vehicles.
- Does not include a temporary sleeping accommodation that is rented out for permanent human occupancy.
- Does not allow for onstreet parking.
- Complies with applicable state and local fire safety requirements.
- Complies with applicable state and local tax requirements, including, but not limited to, the payment of local transient occupancy taxes.
- Complies with applicable local requirements for disposal of human waste, or in the absence of applicable local requirements, maintains sanitation facilities that are fully self-contained or connected to a permitted sewage disposal system serving the property.
- Complies with applicable local requirements for disposal of trash, or in the absence, requires all solid waste to be removed from the premises after each occupancy and onsite trash receptacles to abide by applicable animal-protection trash best practices or requirements.
- Complies with applicable local requirements for quiet hours, or in the absence, enforces quiet hours from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- Complies with applicable local requirements relating to low-impact campsites, low-incident camping, or incidental camping, including local zoning, permit, lot size, and setback requirements.
- Designates an operator or property manager who is available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Includes no more than one temporary sleeping accommodation per acre and is located on a parcel of two acres or more.
- Requires all temporary sleeping accommodations to be located no less than 200 feet from any offsite residence and at least 30 feet from an adjoining property or road.
- Is not located on a site in a city that meets specified characteristics in an urbanized area or cluster, and in which at least 75% of the perimeter adjoins parcels developed for urban uses, as specified.
- Has not been used as an SOP for the previous five years, unless the area was an SOP before January 1, 2024 and it met the requirements to be designated as a “low-impact camping area” on January 1, 2023.

A county that has authorized low-impact camping would have administrative and enforcement authority over these provisions, as specified, and must do all of the following:

- Establish a registry of low-impact camping areas that includes specified information.
- Establish a complaint program to support related code enforcement.

- Require all low-impact camping owners or operators to conspicuously post any permit or registration required by the county for operation, and county contact information for complaints or low-impact camping area information.

The bill would require a property owner that offers a low-impact camping area to include in any posting on an online hosting platform, and an online hosting platform to include in any website listing, both the name of the county in which the camping site is located and any required license, permit, or registration number required by the authorizing county, as specified. An online hosting platform must remove any listing within 7 days of receiving a notification from an authorizing county if all of the following conditions apply:

- The license, permit, or registration number associated with the listing is invalid, expired, or has been revoked, or the county has a prohibition on low-impact camping areas that applies to the listing.
- The county has provided notice to the property owner of the camping site that it is not authorized to operate, prior to notifying the online hosting platform.
- The county provided the notification to the online hosting platform that included the URL of the listing, the low-impact camping site property address, the name of the operator, the notice of violation sent to the property owner, and a citation to the local ordinance or code that was violated.

The bill would specify that its provisions do not authorize an individual to access private property without the permission of the landowner. The bill would not require a county to authorize low-impact camping, but establishes minimum requirements for a county that, by ordinance, elects to authorize low-impact camping.

Related Legislation: SB 620 (McGuire), which died on the Assembly Floor without a vote in 2024, was similar to this bill in that it would have excluded a “low-impact camping area,” as defined, from the definition of a special occupancy park that is licensed and regulated by HCD.

SB 1307 (Rubio), Chap. 669/2022, included provisions requiring HCD to post an explanation of the process for a city, county, or city and county to assume the enforcement responsibilities pursuant to the MPA and SOPA, as specified.

SB 325 (O’Connell), Chap 434/2001, established the Special Occupancy Parks Act, separate from the MPA, under the jurisdiction and enforcement of HCD and local enforcement agencies, as specified.

Staff Comments: This bill would exempt “low-impact camping areas,” as defined, from the requirements of the SOPA, thereby exempting these transient occupancy sites from HCD’s direct regulatory and enforcement authority over the construction, maintenance, occupancy, use, and design of these areas, including provisions ensuring the health and safety of occupants. Staff assumes that oversight and enforcement of these sites would primarily shift to local code enforcement officers and law enforcement, if a county elects to authorize low-impact camping pursuant to the bill.

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