

## CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 518 (Ward)

As Amended August 29, 2025

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Exempts a "low-impact camping area," as defined, from the Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA) if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping that meets specified requirements.

**Senate Amendments**

- 1) Cap the number of temporary sleeping accommodations in a low-impact camping area that may be concurrently occupied by recreational vehicles (RVs) to no more than four.
- 2) Require a county that has authorized low-impact camping to alert the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) of the county's choice to authorize low-impact camping areas under this bill.
- 3) Require an online hosting platform to include both of the following in any website listing:
  - a) The name of the county in which the low-impact camping area site is located; and
  - b) A dedicated field for an operator to include any license, permit, or registration required by the county to operate the site.
- 4) Require an online hosting platform to remove any listing for a low-impact camping area from the platform within seven days of receiving a notification by the authorizing county if all of the following conditions are met:
  - a) The license, permit, or registration number associated with the listing is invalid, expired, or has been revoked or the county has a prohibition on low-impact camping areas that applies to the listing;
  - b) Before notifying the online hosting platform, the county has provided written mailed notice to the property owner of the low-impact camping site that it is not authorized to operate; and
  - c) The county provide a notification to the online hosting platform that included the listing URL and property address of the camping area, the name of the operator (if known), the notice of violation sent from the county to the property owner, and a citation to the local ordinance or code that was violated.
- 5) Apply all state and local eviction processes applicable to a special occupancy park to a low-impact camping area.

**COMMENTS**

*Special Occupancy Parks Act:* HCD has authority over mobilehome and special occupancy parks. Both mobilehome parks and RV parks must meet minimum health and safety standards

and are subject to regular inspections. California has a number of state laws covering recreational vehicle parks, including requirements outlined in SOPA. RV parks are required to comply with legally distinct requirements related to permitting, operator responsibilities, and fees. Some of these requirements include toilet, shower, and lavatory provisions; domestic animal limitations; lighting installations; and lot line registrations. Local governments retain land use authority as part of their police powers.

Local agencies may assume special occupancy park authority in place of HCD. In order to do that, local enforcement agencies or a local building or health department must satisfy certain criteria, including:

- 1) Providing prompt and effective recovery assistance or services during or immediately following a disaster;
- 2) Authorization from a local governing body that has jurisdiction over the local building or health department; and
- 3) Possessing the knowledge and expertise to administer the inspection responsibilities.

HCD can limit local enforcement authority to specific areas or parks, and the local enforcement agency can charge fees or be reimbursed by HCD. HCD must also post a description and send annual electronic notices that explain the process for local agencies to assume enforcement authority. A significant number of local agencies representing districts with special occupancy parks gave back enforcement authority to HCD in recent years, citing lack of capacity and/or other limitations after receiving these notices. By exempting low-impact camping sites from SOPA, this bill removes these sites from HCD jurisdiction in counties that have authorized low-impact camping via ordinance and that meet the standards in the bill, essentially returning these sites to local-only oversight.

*Low-Impact Camping Areas:* This bill defines low-impact camping areas as any area of private property that provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation for recreational purposes that meets specified criteria. Low-impact camping areas are small-scale (nine or fewer sites), short-term (no more than 14 consecutive days and 28 days per year per camper), recreational, private campgrounds – typically imagined as open areas on private, rural properties that can support a handful of tents, RVs, yurts, or the like.

These small, private camping areas are regulated as special occupancy parks under existing law and also have to comply with any local land use and planning requirements. For these small-scale operators, the author and sponsors contend that some of the minimum requirements under SOPA may be cost-prohibitive and unnecessary. This bill would establish a minimum framework for counties who wish to formally authorize low-impact camping within their borders and in counties that adopt such an ordinance, the bill would remove these sites from SOPA and instead subject them to various requirements enumerated in the bill. The author and sponsor argue this would provide an opportunity to increase affordable access to the outdoors, help develop rural economies, and diversify and supplement incomes for rural landowners.

#### **According to the Author**

"AB 518, the Low Impact Camping Areas Act of 2025, is a transformative step toward expanding outdoor recreation opportunities while fostering rural economic growth and land conservation. By streamlining the permitting process for small, low-impact camping areas

(LICAs), this bill will alleviate the strain on overcrowded state and national parks, making outdoor experiences more accessible and affordable for millions of Californians. As demand for outdoor recreation continues to surge, AB 518 ensures that more people can enjoy nature while supporting sustainable land use.

Beyond enhancing recreational access, AB 518 provides much-needed economic relief for farmers, ranchers, and rural landowners facing rising costs of land ownership. By allowing them to generate supplemental income through small-scale, environmentally responsible camping, the bill promotes land retention and conservation, preventing unnecessary development. With clear local oversight and regulations in place, LICAs will strike a balance between expanding public access to nature and preserving California's rural landscapes. AB 518 is an investment in both outdoor equity and the sustainability of the state's natural resources."

### **Arguments in Support**

According to Hipcamp, the bill's sponsor, "Camping areas in California are currently subject to two levels of regulation: local and state. This means that to host even a few campers in California, a landowner needs to obtain both a permit or permission from local government and a costly and time-intensive state permit. Local governments traditionally manage land use in their communities and are best suited to decide if, how, where, and to what standards small-scale camping in their communities should be allowed. But due to antiquated language in the Special Occupancy Parks Act, originally written to manage mobile home park developments, landowners looking to welcome small-scale outdoor recreation on their properties need to get approval from both their local government and via the California Department of Housing and Community Development. This process can take over a year and cost tens of thousands of dollars. It also includes standards that, while appropriate for mobile home and RV parks, are less suited to a small number of campsites on an open landscape, working farm, or other rural property. AB 518 defines a new category of camping known as 'low-impact camping areas' (LICAs). Eligible LICAs are still required to obtain all applicable local permissions, but would no longer be required to also obtain the costly and time-intensive secondary state permit if they live in a county or municipality that opts into AB 518's allowances."

### **Arguments in Opposition**

According to the Solano County Board of Supervisors, "The current version of AB 518 still opens the door to land use conflicts, public safety hazards, and governance challenges that disproportionately affect suburban and rural counties. Under the requirements of the bill, counties would be responsible for establishing a registry of camping sites, creating a complaint and enforcement program, ensuring compliance with sanitation, fire safety, and waste disposal standards, and overseeing potentially dozens or hundreds of unpermitted camping operations spread across large rural and semi-rural areas. These requirements would impose unfunded administrative and enforcement responsibilities on Solano County."

## **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) 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)

## **VOTES:**

### **ASM HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: 10-1-1**

**YES:** Haney, Patterson, Ávila Farías, Caloza, Garcia, Kalra, Lee, Quirk-Silva, Ta, Wicks

**NO:** Gallagher

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Wilson

### **ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 63-0-16**

**YES:** Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Davies, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Zbur, Rivas

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Addis, Castillo, Chen, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Hadwick, Macedo, Pellerin, Sanchez, Soria, Stefani, Tangipa, Wilson

## **UPDATED**

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