

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1398 (Rubio)
As Amended March 25, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

This bill would authorize a state agency to use the Green Globes certification as an alternative to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) to meet green building requirements.

Major Provisions

- 1) Authorizes a state agency undertaking a new building or major renovation project, as an alternative to obtaining LEED Gold certification, to obtain Three Green Globes or higher certification, as specified.
- 2) Authorizes, as an alternative to obtaining LEED Silver, state agency building or renovation projects to obtain Two Green Globes certification, as specified.
- 3) Specifies that this bill applies to projects for which the project schematic design documents are initiated by the state agency on or after January 1, 2027.
- 4) Defines "Green Globes" to mean the certification program under the auspices of the Green Building Initiative.

COMMENTS

Background.

Executive Order B-18-12. In 2012, Governor Brown issued Executive Order (EO) B-18-12, which among other things, required new state buildings, major renovations, and build-to-suit leases larger than 10,000 square feet to obtain LEED Silver or higher certification. Additionally, the EO required state agencies to reduce overall water use at the facilities they operate by 10% by 2015 and by 20% by 2020, as measured against a 2010 baseline. The Department of General Services (DGS) was tasked to develop policies and guidelines for the operation and maintenance of State buildings to achieve operating efficiency improvements and water and resource conservation.

State building requirements. Existing law, pursuant to SB 416 (Laird, Chapter 395, Statutes of 2023) requires that all new buildings or major renovation projects undertaken by a state agency obtain the LEED Gold or higher certification, except as provided. The Senate Governmental Organization Committee analysis of that bill noted that:

According to the United States Green Building Council's (GBC's) internet website, "LEED-certified buildings save money, improve efficiency, lower carbon emissions and create healthier places for people. They are critical to addressing climate change and meeting ESG goals, enhancing resilience, and supporting more equitable communities. LEED categories can also contribute toward meeting the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals."

To achieve LEED certification, a project earns points by adhering to the prerequisites and credits that address carbon, energy, water, waste, transportation, materials, health, and indoor

environmental quality. Projects go through a verification and review process and are awarded points that correspond to a level of LEED certification: Certified (40-49 points), Silver (50-59 points), Gold (60-79 points), and Platinum (80+ points).

LEED and Green Globes. As an alternative to achieving LEED Gold or higher certification, as specified, this bill would additionally authorize a state agency undertaking a new building or major renovation project to achieve Three Green Globes or higher certification. While LEED certification is handled by two related – but distinct – organizations, the Green Globes building certification process is handled by the Green Building Initiative. Under the LEED, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) develops and maintains the LEED rating system such as the standards, credits, and updates; and Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI) is responsible for review of the project documentation, verifying compliance, and awarding LEED certification levels. LEED is powered by comprehensive education offerings designed to equip professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to design, build, and operate sustainable buildings.

Green Globes certification is administered by The Green Building Initiative which owns, develops, and certifies the Green Globes rating system. Unlike LEED (which splits standards and certification across two organizations), Green Building Initiative does both. Under this system, projects complete an online assessment, then work with a Green Globes Initiative-approved third-party assessor who reviews documentation, conducts a site visit, and validates the score. Supporters of this approach argue that Green Globes offer a faster, cheaper, and more flexible certification process. It is one of only two whole building certification programs recognized by the U.S. federal government. Whole building certification evaluates a building's total performance across energy use, water efficiency, materials, building systems (including HVAC, lighting, and plumbing), indoor environment quality, and site — rather than any single feature in isolation.

It should be noted that in addition to the federal government, a host of states (Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, and Colorado) and municipalities have adopted policies that include Green Globes as equivalent to LEED for various infrastructure assets including state and municipal infrastructure, multi family, commercial, industrial, data centers and more. The author's office further notes that GBI has certified more than 1 billion square feet of commercial and multifamily space worldwide, and 53,291,200 of those square feet are located within California.

This bill provides that the authority to obtain Three Green Globes or higher for new buildings or major renovations to any such projects undertaken by a state agency on or after January 1, 2027.

According to the Author

According to the author, "This bill would update California law to recognize additional equivalent green building certifications, such as Green Globes, for state infrastructure projects. This change will provide the DGS with greater flexibility to select the certification system that is most appropriate and cost-effective for each project, while still maintaining strong sustainability standards. By explicitly authorizing additional certification options in statute, SB 1398 will help reduce unnecessary costs, avoid delays, and promote greater efficiency in the delivery of state infrastructure projects.

Additionally, "broader recognition of Green Globes in California can support sustainability efforts beyond state government, including in multifamily housing, commercial development, academic facilities, data centers, and other building sectors."

Arguments in Support

This bill is sponsored by the Green Building Initiative, which argues, "Explicitly including Green Globes in California statute as on par with other named green building certifications will provide for greater competition, flexibility, and cost effectiveness for state infrastructure projects required to meet green building standards." This bill is also supported by building and contractor associations.

Arguments in Opposition

This bill is opposed by The U.S. Green Building Council, which argues, "California should not bypass DGS review and presume that Green Globes is sufficient for a state framework tied to the state's 2035 operational net-zero target." This bill is also opposed by the International Living Future Institute.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations analysis, "Minor and absorbable costs to the Department of General Services (DGS), which oversees state building and renovation projects."

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3**

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNERney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASM GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION: 20-0-2

YES: Blanca Rubio, Davies, Alvarez, Bryan, Carrillo, Chen, Dixon, Fong, Gabriel, Gipson, Macedo, Nguyen, Pacheco, Ramos, Michelle Rodriguez, Solache, Soria, Ta, Valencia, Wallis
ABS, ABST OR NV: Berman, McKinnor

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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