

## SENATE THIRD READING

SB 514 (Cabaldon)

As Amended September 02, 2025

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Eliminates the sunset date on the statewide program to allow qualified entities to support and augment the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in its defensible space and home hardening assessment; adds nonprofit entities focused on wildfire resiliency and contractors who conduct specified wildfire resiliency activities to the list of qualified entities; and, authorizes qualified entities to additionally assess compliance with defensible space requirements applicable to local responsibility areas (LRA).

**Major Provisions**

- 1) Authorizes the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to allow certification of contractors who conduct defensible space, home hardening, fuel reduction, roadside clearance, and other contracting activities for wildfire resiliency efforts and who have completed the training program developed pursuant to existing law or an equivalent program.
- 2) Expands the definition of "qualified entity" to include Firewise USA organizations, and nonprofit entities focused on wildfire resiliency.
- 3) Requires the qualified entities participating in the program to be authorized by the director to additionally assess compliance with the defensible space requirements in the LRA.
- 4) Requires data obtained voluntarily from a property owner to be anonymized and kept confidential if requested by the property owner, and prohibits the data from being used for compliance or enforcement purposes associated with ordinances that directly relate to defensible space and home hardening investigations unless specifically requested by the property owner.
- 5) Requires CAL FIRE's annual reporting to the Legislature on defensible space compliance to additionally include defensible space compliance in the LRA.
- 6) Finds and declares that the amendments to PRC 4291.5 impose a limitation on the public's right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies within the meaning of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution.
- 7) Eliminates the January 1, 2026, sunset date on CAL FIRE's defensible space training program.

**COMMENTS**

Defensible space is the buffer created between a building on a property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it helps protect structures from catching fire.

Homeowners are responsible for maintaining defensible space around their property. According to a 2021 Legislative Analyst's Office report, researchers have explored – mostly using survey data and interviews – some of the barriers homeowners typically face related to completing defensible space work, including prohibitive costs and/or time constraints, inadequate motivation to comply, and incomplete understanding of the nature of the risk to their home.

In 2023, the OSFM established a statewide program to allow qualified entities to support CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment and education efforts. Qualified entities include the California Conservation Corps, California Volunteers, Resource Conservation Districts, Fire Safe Councils, Firewise, University of California Fire Advisors, Registered Professional Foresters, and local agencies, and who, once certified, can then provide nonregulatory assistance to homeowners to reduce fire risk and achieve compliance with defensible space requirements within the state responsibility area.

CAL FIRE acknowledges that the training program will create more face-to-face interaction and educational opportunities between homeowners and individuals who are trained in defensible space and home hardening. By expanding the program to the LRA, this bill will have a farther reach to more properties across the state to provide greater wildfire resilience.

SB 514 expands the list of qualified entities to include nonprofits and contractors, boosting the workforce that can skillfully inform and educate residents living in more urban areas in the LRA.

### **According to the Author**

As California's wildfire season lengthens, and the number of residential areas considered high risk grows, it's more critical than ever that property owners maintain defensible space around their homes. Existing ordinances and regulations require them to do so, but research suggests that many do not – either because they lack the resources or don't fully understand the risk that fire poses to their property. The state has left defensible space rules largely unenforced with an average inspection rate of just 17%. Nonetheless, fear of enforcement can make homeowners reluctant to seek technical assistance on how to create defensible space. SB 514 will help by encouraging property owners to voluntarily comply. The bill lets those who request defensible space inspections keep their data confidential and ensures the information won't be used for enforcement against them. It also allows wildfire resiliency non-profits and qualified contractors to do inspections. Finally, it removes the sunset from the defensible space data reporting platform, which allows the state to gather information about compliance, helping California further understand how our homes can be protected.

### **Arguments in Support**

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation write that SB 514, "would significantly support and advance California's goals for protecting and making our communities across the state safer from catastrophic wildfires, through defensible space and other wildfire resilience projects that are essential to the safety and sustainability of our communities. SB 514 will authorize and expand CAL FIRE's approval of local defensible space inspections, surveys, outreach and education to benefit residents, property owners, vulnerable communities and businesses. SB 514 will enable all members of those communities to take advantage of essential defensible space and wildfire prevention measures to help themselves."

### **Arguments in Opposition**

None on file

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, costs of an unknown, likely minor, amount for CAL FIRE to implement this bill.

**VOTES****SENATE FLOOR: 38-0-2**

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

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Limón, Reyes

**ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0**

**YES:** Bryan, Alanis, Connolly, Ellis, Flora, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4**

**YES:** Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Ahrens, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Sanchez, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

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