

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 655 (Stern) – As Amended July 17, 2025

Policy Committee: Housing and Community Development Vote: 10 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill declares it is the established policy of the state that all dwelling units be able to attain and maintain a safe maximum indoor temperature, and requires all relevant state agencies to consider this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing relevant policies, programs, criteria, and regulations.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Declares the established policy of the state be that all dwelling units, defined as a structure or the part of a structure used as a home, residence, or sleeping place by one person who maintains a household or by two or more persons who maintain a common household, be able to attain and maintain a safe maximum indoor temperature.
- 2) Requires every relevant state agency, including but not limited to, the California Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, Public Utilities Commission, State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, State Air Resources Board, State Department of Health Care Services, State Department of Public Health (CDPH), and Strategic Growth Council, to consider the state policy described above as follows:
 - a) When revising, adopting, or establishing policies, programs, and criteria, including grant criteria, relevant to achieving this state policy.
 - b) Beginning January 1, 2027, when revising, adopting, or establishing regulations relevant to achieving this state policy.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) HCD anticipates minor and absorbable General Fund (GF) costs.
- 2) CDPH indicates GF costs of \$180,000 in fiscal year 2026-27 and annually thereafter, for one position to integrate considerations and mechanisms to maintain a safe maximum indoor air temperature when revising, adopting, or establishing relevant policies, programs, regulations, and criteria.
- 3) GF costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount to other specified state agencies to consider this state policy while revising or establishing policies, programs, criteria, and regulations that impact achieving a safe maximum indoor temperature.

- 4) Potential future GF cost pressures to achieve, through adopted building standards and incentive programs, a maximum safe indoor air temperature for newly constructed residential dwelling units, and eventually all residential dwellings.
- 5) Unlike other similar declarations of state policy, this bill does not contain language specifying this declaration does not expand any obligation of the state or require the expenditure of additional resources. Absent this language, it is possible the bill's provisions could be interpreted by a court to require the state to ensure the policy at the state's expense. The likelihood of such a decision is unknown. If such a decision were to occur, the costs to the state could be significant.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** The author seeks to protect vulnerable persons from extreme heat events by helping to ensure adequate cooling in residential buildings. According to the author:

As Californians face the growing impacts of climate change, extreme heat is among the most alarming and deadly. Vulnerable populations including our elderly, children, those with preexisting health conditions, and low income individuals where access to cooling resources may be limited, are disproportionately affected. The State must address and prepare for extreme heat, promote energy efficiency, and secure safe and healthy housing for all Californians. This bill unifies relevant state efforts around the common-sense goal of refuge from extreme heat in one's own home.

- 2) **Background.** Research shows that heat-related health impacts affect almost exclusively lower-income and disadvantaged communities, persons with disabilities, and seniors. Existing state law requires every residential building to include adequate heating, but not adequate cooling.

Existing law requires HCD to provide recommendations to the Legislature to help ensure residential dwelling units can maintain a safe indoor temperature. HCD recently released its report to the Legislature. Aligning with goals identified in the Governor's 2022 California Extreme Heat Action Plan, the report recommended the state consider a general maximum safe indoor air temperature of 82 degrees Fahrenheit for residential dwelling units, implemented through updated building standards for newly constructed residential dwelling units, and incentive programs for retrofitting existing residential dwelling units, manufactured homes, and mobilehomes.

This bill declares it is the state's policy that all dwelling units be able to attain and maintain a safe maximum indoor temperature. The bill but does not establish or otherwise reference a specific temperature.

This bill is modeled after similar existing declarations, such as the state's declared policies that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water, and that every human being has the right to access sufficient affordable and healthy food. Also similar to existing declarations, this bill requires relevant state agencies to consider this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, programs, criteria, and regulations relevant to achieving the policy.

Unlike existing declarations of state policy, this bill does not include language specifying its declaration of state policy does not expand any obligation of the state or require the expenditure of additional resources.

- 3) **Prior Legislation.** AB 2597 (Bloom), of the 2021-22 Legislative Session, would have required HCD to develop, propose, and submit mandatory building standards for adequate residential cooling for both new and existing units. AB 2597 was held in the Senate Housing Committee.

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