

SENATE THIRD READING  
SB 676 (Limón and Blakespear)  
As Amended September 02, 2025  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Beginning January 1, 2027, establishes expedited administrative and judicial review procedures under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a project to maintain, repair, restore, demolish, or replace wildfire-damaged property or facilities located in an area for which the Governor declared a state of emergency, requiring the courts to resolve lawsuits within 270 days, to the extent feasible.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Requires, on and after January 1, 2027, for a project that is (1) located in a geographic area for which the Governor declared a state of emergency and (2) to maintain, repair, restore, demolish, or replace property or facilities damaged or destroyed by wildfire and (3) not otherwise exempt from CEQA under the existing emergency exemption or by a Governor's executive order:
  - a) Concurrent preparation of the administrative record pursuant to Public Resources Code 21167.6.2.
  - b) Lawsuits challenging approval of the project to be resolved, to the extent feasible, within 270 calendar days of the filing of the certified record of proceedings with the court.
- 2) Requires the Judicial Council to adopt rules of court to implement this requirement.
- 3) Requires the applicant to agree to pay the costs of the trial court and court of appeal, as specified.
- 4) Provides the bill:
  - a) Applies only to a project that is consistent with the applicable zoning and land use ordinances.
  - b) Does not apply to a project that is proposed after the Governor rescinds the emergency declaration.
  - c) Applies to projects in a geographic area that was damaged by fire for which the Governor has declared a state of emergency on or after January 1, 2023.

## COMMENTS

CEQA provides a process for evaluating the environmental effects of applicable projects undertaken or approved by public agencies. If a project is not exempt from CEQA, an initial study is prepared to determine whether the project may have a significant effect on the environment. If the initial study shows that there would not be a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency must prepare a negative declaration. If the initial study shows that

the project may have a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency must prepare an EIR.

An EIR must accurately describe the proposed project, identify and analyze each significant environmental impact expected to result from the proposed project, identify mitigation measures to reduce those impacts to the extent feasible, and evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project. If mitigation measures are required or incorporated into a project, the agency must adopt a reporting or monitoring program to ensure compliance with those measures.

Generally, CEQA actions taken by public agencies can be challenged in superior court once the agency approves or determines to carry out the project. CEQA appeals are subject to unusually short statutes of limitations. Under current law, court challenges of CEQA decisions generally must be filed within 30-35 days, depending on the type of decision. The courts are required to give CEQA actions preference over all other civil actions. However, the schedules for briefing, hearing, and decision are less definite. The petitioner must request a hearing within 90 days of filing the petition and, generally, briefing must be completed within 90 days of the request for hearing. There is no deadline specified for the court to render a decision.

### **According to the Author**

The LA wildfires, Eaton and Palisades have reportedly caused property losses close to \$53 billion. In addition, a few weeks prior to the LA wildfires, the Mountain Fire in Camarillo destroyed 243 structures. As wildfire risks continue to rise every year, it is imperative that we ensure affected communities can be restored after a disaster. By adding consistency to the community rebuilding process, SB 676 aims to support the state's wildfire resiliency efforts.

### **Arguments in Support**

According to Santa Barbara County, SB 676 is a critical tool to support timely, equitable recovery in the wake of disasters our County knows all too well...It also respects local control by requiring projects to comply with zoning, land use ordinances, general plans, and community standards...Importantly, the bill covers projects not eligible for streamlined local permitting—such as private schools, camps, and those in sensitive overlay zones—and provides targeted CEQA relief...As wildfire threats grow statewide, SB 676 offers a consistent, equitable rebuilding framework—avoiding reliance on case-by-case exemptions or executive orders.

According to the California Apartment Association, (p)rojects rebuilt following a Governor-declared emergency, like the LA Wildfires, are already exempt from CEQA under existing law. For numerous reasons, however, property owners may choose to build a home, rental property, or commercial building that is substantially different from what was burned down, in which case they are not exempt from CEQA. For those projects in these burned areas, SB 676 shortens the amount of time if a property owner is faced with a CEQA challenge.

According to the California Association of Realtors, SB 676 ensures that rebuilding efforts after a major fire are not impeded by unnecessary delays in the courts.

According to the League of California Cities, (SB 676's) streamlined approach will help accelerate any legal challenges to projects impacted by fire and to further support the state's wildfire resiliency efforts.

### **Arguments in Opposition**

According to Judicial Council, (SB 676) is problematic as CEQA actions are already entitled under current law to calendar preference "over all other civil actions"...Imposing an expedited 270-day judicial review timeline on top of existing CEQA calendar preferences is arbitrary and likely to be unworkable in practice. This limited timeframe is especially restrictive if the court of appeal or the California Supreme Court must also decide some portion of a CEQA case. Even assuming that no extensions of time are granted for any aspect of the proceedings, it takes an estimated six months to get a case to hearing in the superior court, plus the additional time for the judge to decide and issue a decision...Unlike other "judicial streamlining" legislation, which the Judicial Council categorically opposes due to calendaring pressures, SB 676 deviates even further by seeking to require judicial streamlining not just to a particular project but to a broad and densely populated geographical area of Los Angeles where each parcel of land is potentially a cause of action...Senate Bill 676 also requires the Judicial Council to adopt rules of court to implement the bill. The aforementioned unworkable language in SB 676 presents not only an incalculable obligation for the courts to undertake in terms of anticipated workload but it also presents an impossible task for the Judicial Council because it requires the Council to adopt new rules of court to attempt to manage many different projects and many different CEQA lawsuits. The Council cannot conceivably adopt an appropriate rule of court that would adequately account for the myriad causes of action the courts would receive should this legislation succeed as currently drafted.

### **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, ongoing cost pressures (Trial Court Trust Fund (TCTF), General Fund) of an unknown but potentially significant amount, possibly in the hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars, to the courts to process and hear CEQA challenges within the timeframes prescribed by the bill. Judicial Council is unable to determine how many CEQA non-compliance challenges may be brought, but given the widespread damage wildfires can cause throughout the state in any given year, Judicial Council estimates this bill would significantly affect court calendars where a fire emergency has occurred – particularly in the state's smallest courts in more rural parts of the state (where wildfires are typically more common), which typically have fewer resources. The bill requires the applicant to pay the costs of the trial court and the court of appeal in hearing and deciding any action or proceeding brought under this bill. The committee assumes Judicial Council would amend the existing rule of court 3.2240 – which provides a \$180,000 filing fee for specific streamlined CEQA projects – to include challenges covered by this bill.

### **VOTES**

#### **SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1**

**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, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Reyes

#### **ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 12-0-2**

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

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Garcia, Wicks

**ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0**

**YES:** Kalra, Dixon, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Harabedian, Macedo, Pacheco, Papan, Sanchez, Stefani, 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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