

Briefing Materials

Prepared for the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Assembly Bill 524 Subcommittee Meeting on April 18, 2025

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Overview of the California Legislative Process

This text originally appeared in the Briefing Materials for the October 30, 2023, Task Force meeting.

The process of government by which bills are considered and laws enacted is commonly referred to as the Legislative Process. The California State Legislature is made up of two houses: the Senate and the Assembly. There are 40 Senators and 80 Assembly Members representing the people of the State of California. The Legislature has a [legislative calendar](#) containing important dates of activities during its two-year session.

The following outlines the legislative process.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in California

1. **All legislation begins as an idea or concept** that comes from a variety of sources. The process begins when a Senator or Assembly Member decides to author a bill.
2. **A Legislator sends the idea for the bill to the Legislative Counsel** where it is drafted into the actual bill. The draft of the bill is returned to the Legislator for introduction. If the author is a Senator, the bill is introduced in the Senate. If the author is an Assembly Member, the bill is introduced in the Assembly.
3. **First read/introduction:** A bill is introduced or read the first time when the bill number, the name of the author, and the descriptive title of the bill is read on the floor of the house. The bill is then sent to the Office of State Printing. No bill may be acted upon until 30 days has passed from the date of its introduction.
4. **Committee hearings:** The bill then goes to the Rules Committee of the house of origin where it is assigned to the appropriate policy committee for its first hearing. Bills are assigned to policy committees according to subject area of the bill. Bills that have a fiscal impact or a state cost are also heard in the fiscal committees: Senate Appropriations or Assembly Appropriations. Each house has a number of policy committees and a fiscal committee. Each committee is made up of a specified number of Senators or Assembly Members and reviews the bill through the lens of the committee's particular subject area. During the committee hearing the author presents the bill to the committee and testimony can be heard in support of or opposition to the bill. The committee then votes by passing the bill, passing the bill as amended, or defeating the bill. Bills can be amended several times. Letters of support or opposition are important and should be mailed to the author and

committee members before the bill is scheduled to be heard in committee. It takes a majority vote of the full committee membership for a bill to be passed by the committee. Each house maintains a schedule of legislative committee hearings. Prior to a bill's hearing, a bill analysis is prepared by the committee that explains current law, what the bill is intended to do, and some background information. Typically, the analysis also lists organizations that support or oppose the bill.

5. **Second and third reading:** Bills passed by committees are read a second time on the floor in the house of origin and then assigned to third reading. Bill analyses are also prepared prior to third reading. When a bill is read the third time it is presented by the author, discussed by the Members and voted on by a roll call vote. Bills that require an appropriation or that take effect immediately, generally require a two-thirds majority (27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly) to be passed. Other bills generally require a simple majority (21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly). If a bill is defeated, the Member may seek reconsideration and another vote.
6. **Repeat process in other house:** Once the bill has been approved by the house of origin it proceeds to the second house where the procedure is repeated.
7. **Resolution of differences:** If a bill is amended in the second house, it must go back to its house of origin for concurrence, which is agreement on the amendments. If agreement cannot be reached, the bill is referred to a two-house conference committee to resolve differences. Three members of the committee are from the Senate and three are from the Assembly. If a compromise is reached, the bill is returned to both houses for a vote.
8. **Arrives at the Governor:** If both houses approve a bill, it then goes to the Governor. The Governor has three choices: 1) sign the bill into law, 2) allow it to become law without their signature, or 3) veto it. A governor's veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in both houses. Most bills go into effect on the first day of January of the next year. Urgency measures take effect immediately after they are signed or allowed to become law without signature.
9. **Enacted into law:** Bills that are passed by the Legislature and approved by the Governor are assigned a chapter number by the Secretary of State. These Chaptered Bills (also referred to as Statutes of the year they were enacted) then become part of the California Codes. The California Codes are a comprehensive collection of laws grouped by subject matter. The California Constitution sets forth the fundamental laws by which the State of California is governed. All amendments to the

Constitution come about as a result of constitutional amendments presented to the people for their approval.

Above text adapted from the California State Association of Counties [“Overview of California Legislative Process.”](#)

How to Submit Position Letters

Individuals or organizations wishing to express their support for or opposition to a bill before it is heard by a legislative committee may submit a position letter. Once a letter is submitted it becomes available for the selected committee to review. Position letters can also be sent to the staff of the bill author.

[This webpage](#) provides information on how to submit position letters to the California State Assembly. Key takeaways:

1. Position letters must be submitted to the Committee by 5 p.m. one week prior to the day of the scheduled hearing of the bill (April 23 for a hearing on April 30).
2. Letters must be on a letterhead indicating the identity of the organization.
3. Letters must be signed by those listed on the letter.
4. Letters may be submitted electronically through the [California Legislature Advocates Portal](#).

Position Letter Examples

The California Chapter of the American Planning Association has examples of position letters it has drafted on [its website](#). An example of one such letter is below.



March 27, 2025

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8140
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 609 (Wicks) California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): Infill Housing Exemption – Support

Dear Assemblymember Wicks,

The American Planning Association, California Chapter (APA California) is pleased to **support** your AB 609, which would exempt from the requirements of CEQA a housing development project that meets certain conditions. The bill would require a local government, as a condition of approval for the development, to require the development proponent to complete a phase I environmental assessment, as provided.

APA California is a non-profit organization made up of practicing planners, citizens and public officials committed to advancing the practice of local, regional, and statewide planning throughout urban, suburban, and rural California. As adopted in APA California's Legislative Platform, *Plan California*, our organization is supportive of efforts that minimize constraints to housing production.

California continues to grapple with a severe housing crisis, further compounded by the devastating fires in Los Angeles. While the Legislature has passed many changes to the housing entitlement and permitting process over the years, we believe it's important to look at other potential constraints to housing development, including CEQA's redundant review process. While regional plans, housing elements, and local zoning laws must already comply with CEQA, most individual housing projects—even those fully aligned with local zoning and objective standards—must still undergo the same review. While some projects qualify for exemptions, they often include other requirements that make them less advantageous to use.

While the intent of CEQA is to prevent negative environmental impacts, it can be a drawn-out process adding time and cost to deliver housing in existing urban areas near jobs, schools, transit and other amenities. Infill housing is proven to reduce per capita greenhouse gas emissions, but faces the same regulatory hurdles as sprawl developments that increase pollution and congestion. AB 609 removes this roadblock by exempting environmentally friendly housing projects from CEQA, provided they are in infill locations and not on environmentally sensitive or hazardous sites. These projects must still comply with local general plans, zoning ordinances, and objective standards—all of which have already undergone CEQA review. To qualify, projects must



American Planning Association
California Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

meet minimum density thresholds (15 units per acre in urban areas, 10 in suburban areas, and 5 in rural areas) and be no larger than 20 acres.

We appreciate your dedication to this important issue and for the reasons outlined above, APA California is pleased to support AB 609. If you have any questions, please contact Lauren De Valencia, Stefan/George Associates, APA California's lobbyist, at 916 443-5301, lauren@stefangeorge.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Reuben Duarte'.

Reuben Duarte
Vice President Policy and Legislation
APA California

cc: The Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee
 The Assembly Local Government Committee
 The Governor's Office
 The Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
 The California Department of Housing and Community Development



LORI D. WILSON
 Assemblywoman, District 11

FACT SHEET

Lori D. Wilson Assemblywoman, District 11 Fact Sheet

AB 524 - Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Act (FACT-CA)

Summary

This bill would create a new land access program at the Department of Conservation in consultation with the Strategic Growth Council’s Agricultural Land Equity Task Force, to address one of the largest challenges California’s beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers face: land tenure. This program would create opportunities for farmers who have the greatest need for land security, while simultaneously supporting great agricultural land conservation in California.

Background

There has been a history of racial discrimination, land removal policies, and unjust lending that have removed farmers and land stewards from their land, such as decades of discriminatory practices by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - which the agency has acknowledged¹; the California Alien Land Law, and the plethora of laws and policies discriminating against Native Americans and denying the existence of tribal government powers.

The State of California has taken steps to apologize, acknowledge, and address these historic wrongs. The Governor’s Executive Order No. N-15-19 acknowledged that tribal communities have faced extensive violence, exploitation, dispossession, and attempted destruction while persisting in stewarding and protecting lands. The Farmer Equity Act defined “socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers”(SDFR) as well as developed a report that demonstrates that land tenure is a core challenge, stating “Many socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers do not have a stable, long-term arrangement for land. This affects the long-term sustainability of their businesses as well as the ability to incorporate conservation practices.”²

Today, land access has never been more unattainable as we see rapid rates of land loss and soaring land prices. The Department of Conservation estimates nearly 50,000 acres of agricultural land are lost annually, weakening rural economies and ecosystems. According to the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, in 2024, the average price of an acre of farmland in California was \$13,400—among the highest in the country.

Problem

Given the history of policies and laws that have discriminated, removed, and overall prevented SDFRs from obtaining ag land, much needs to be done to right these wrongs and transition land to today’s farmers and land stewards. Without access to secure land, farmers have limited stability on the land they rent, which leads to an inability to invest in sustainable agriculture and conservation practices or apply for many existing government programs.

Furthermore, to date, there is not a single program or policy in the State of California aimed at addressing the fundamental challenge of land access for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Solution

Increasing land tenure for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers through ownership or long-term leases addresses essential equity and conservation commitments by the state. This program will increase land tenure, protect it from sprawl development, and create new opportunities to support sustainable agriculture practices and land stewardship.

Contact

Name: Mark Rossow, Legislative Director
 Phone: 916.319.2011
 Email: Mark.Rossow@asm.ca.gov

Support

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) - sponsor

¹ Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, “Our Commitment to Civil Rights. March 29, 2021; From USDA Secretary Vilsack ([link](#))

² California Department of Food & Agriculture (2020). 2020 Report to the California Legislature on the Farmer Equity Act; ([link](#))

[AB 524 Bill Text](#)

[California Proposition 4 \(2025 Climate Bond\) California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force](#)
Section Language

93550. (a) Of the funds made available by Section 93500, thirty million dollars (\$30,000,000) shall be available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to the Department of Conservation, in consultation with the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force at the Strategic Growth Council, to improve land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, tribal producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers.

(b) The Department of Conservation may make lowinterest loans to qualified entities, which shall include land trusts, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, farmer cooperatives, tribal governments, or tribal entities, for the purpose of acquiring agricultural lands to transfer or provide long-term leases to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and beginning farmers and ranchers.

(c) Any agricultural land acquired pursuant to this section shall be required to have an agricultural land conservation easement before being leased or transferred, and the department may require additional appropriate resale restrictions, such as affordability provisions, preemptive purchase right, or shared appreciation consistent with the purposes of this subdivision.

(d) The Department of Conservation shall ensure that the proceeds of future resales of land continue to be used for purposes of this chapter.