



AB 357 (Alvarez): Exempting Student, Faculty, and Staff Housing Projects from Coastal Commission Review

Bill Summary

AB 357 exempts certain student, faculty, and staff housing developments in the Coastal Zone from Coastal Commission review.

Problem

The Coastal Zone is a stretch of land that runs the entire coast of California, ranging from as little as half a mile to as much as five miles inland that was designated as critical enough to warrant special status by the 1976 Coastal Act. This designation resulted in the creation of the Coastal Commission, which is tasked with conserving California's coastline by overseeing and regulating the vast majority of developments proposed within the Coastal Zone through issuing coastal development permits or certifying the Local Coastal Plans.

The Coastal Commission has since imposed substantial restrictions on development that have created a critical shortage of available housing along California's coast. Researchers at the Turner Center found that between 1980 and 2010, the housing units in the typical U.S. Metro grew by 54 percent, while California's Coastal Metros only increased by 32 percent, despite significant population growth.¹ This discrepancy has driven up costs, rendering the coast unaffordable for the vast majority of Californians.

For college campuses in the Coastal Zone, a requirement for Coastal Commission approval extends the already lengthy timelines for review and further increases the cost of developing student housing. Given that the UC, CSU, CCC, and nonprofit developers build student housing with the primary motivation of serving the public good, this

additional level of review by the Coastal Commission is redundant. With the majority of students in California experiencing housing insecurity in a given year,² it is essential to reduce barriers to new student housing development, including review by the Coastal Commission.

Solution

This bill would exempt student housing developed by a public institution of higher education or a qualified nonprofit from review by the Coastal Commission, allowing California's colleges to develop student housing more efficiently and affordably.

This bill would primarily impact institutions of higher education currently in the Coastal Zone, including Cuesta College, Santa Barbara City College, UC Santa Barbara, UC San Diego, and parts of UC Irvine and UC Santa Cruz. At these campuses, AB 357 would eliminate a redundancy of environmental standards in student housing development, streamlining the creation of new units and making a substantial step towards addressing the ongoing student housing crisis in California.

Support

- Student HOMES Coalition (Sponsor)
- UC Student Association (Co-Sponsor)

For More Information

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1: Source: California Legislative Analyst's Office. "California's High Housing Costs: Causes and Consequences." Sacramento, CA. November 2015. <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/finance/housing-costs/housing-costs.pdf>

2: Source: California Student Aid Commission. "Food and Housing Basic Needs Survey 2023." November 2023. https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/food_and_housing_basic_needs_survey_2023.pdf.