

SUPPORT AB 609 (WICKS): Environmentally-Beneficial Housing

AB 609 will end the abuse of CEQA to block environmentally-friendly housing by creating objective criteria for exempting these homes from CEQA review.

Infill housing projects, or homes built in developed urban areas, are significantly more climate and environmentally-friendly than sprawl.

- ➔ Sprawl forces people into longer commutes, making it one of the leading causes of rising carbon emissions in the state.
- ➔ Development in California's natural lands also destroys and degrades natural resources that make us more resilient to climate change and puts more homes into areas at extreme risk of wildfires, floods, and other climate disasters.
- ➔ Building housing in existing communities protects natural lands, better utilizes existing public infrastructure and resources, and results in less climate pollution by reducing car use and long commutes.

However, anti-housing activists routinely use the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lawsuits to slow or block these types of sustainable homes.

- ➔ CEQA is a state law that requires government agencies to evaluate and mitigate the environmental impacts of development projects before approving them.
- ➔ The extensive public review and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) required by CEQA adds significant time and cost to new housing.
- ➔ CEQA also allows virtually anyone — including individuals, community groups, and even people not directly impacted by the new housing — to sue a project based on its environmental review, with minimal financial consequence.

State law already recognizes infill housing as environmentally beneficial by exempting certain projects from CEQA, but those exemptions are often too subjective to be effective, or include standards that make the housing infeasible.

AB 609 will create an easy to use CEQA exemption for environmentally-friendly housing projects, making it a powerful incentive for home builders to propose sustainable housing in urban areas across the state.

To qualify for an AB 609 exemption, the project must:

- ➔ Be on a previously developed parcel, or surrounded on almost all sides by existing urban uses.
- ➔ Be consistent with local zoning.
- ➔ Meet minimum density thresholds (at least two homes per typical one-eighth acre lot, or four homes per typical quarter-acre lot).
- ➔ Be on a property less than 20 acres in size.
- ➔ Not be located in a hazardous and environmentally sensitive area.