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AB 956: ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

FACT SHEET



SUMMARY

AB 956 increases the number of detached Accessory Dwelling Units that local agencies may approve on lots with a proposed or existing single-family homes.

BACKGROUND

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), commonly known as granny flats, in-law units, or backyard cottages, have long provided an affordable and flexible housing option in California.

As costs of living continue to rise, more families are relying on ADUs as a practical solution to keep their loved ones close and maintain financial stability. Many households use ADUs to provide independent yet nearby housing for aging parents, ensuring they receive the support they need while preserving their autonomy. Others build ADUs to accommodate adult children who are struggling with high rental costs or to create an additional source of income that helps them afford their mortgage and stay in their community.

In recent years, California has passed multiple laws to support ADU and Junior ADU (JADU) construction, ensuring that homeowners can build additional units with minimal bureaucratic delay. These efforts have included requiring local agencies to approve ADU applications ministerially, limiting impact fees, and prohibiting local governments from imposing arbitrary restrictions that discourage ADU construction.

However, despite these improvements, inconsistencies in local implementation and lingering ambiguity in the law have led to continued delays and uncertainty for homeowners. Many cities still misinterpret or misapply state law, leaving property owners unsure of how many ADUs or JADUs they can build and whether they must be attached or detached from the primary residence.

Other states, like Washington, have taken a more proactive approach to ADU development.

Washington allows each lot to have up to two ADUs, significantly expanding housing opportunities in single-family neighborhoods. This approach acknowledges that many properties have the capacity to support additional ADUs without disrupting neighborhood character.

California, despite its more severe housing crisis, has yet to fully unlock this potential. Many properties have space and infrastructure that could accommodate a second detached ADU but remain restricted due to unclear or overly conservative interpretations of existing laws.

SOLUTION

AB 956 expands housing opportunities by increasing the number of detached Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) that local agencies may approve on properties with an existing or proposed single-family home. By clarifying state law and eliminating confusion around ADU allowances, AB 956 removes unnecessary barriers and ensures that more Californians can benefit from flexible, affordable housing solutions.

SUPPORT

- California Apartment Association
- East Bay for Everyone
- LeadingAge California
- South Pasadena Residents for Responsible Growth

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