

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Juan Carrillo, Chair

AB 1738 (Carrillo) – As Amended March 26, 2026

SUBJECT: State Housing Law: remote inspections.

SUMMARY: Requires a city, including a charter city, county, or city and county (city or county) to offer remote inspections for specified building permits in single- or two-family dwelling units by July 1, 2027. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, by July 1, 2027, a city or county to offer a homeowner or contractor the option of requesting a remote inspection for all or a subset of an inspection required by a building permit for any the following in single- or two-family dwelling units:
 - a) Residential water heaters.
 - b) Residential heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems (HVAC).
 - c) Residential reroofs.
 - d) Minor residential electrical work, including main and subservice panels, rewire work, whole-house fans, ceiling fans, and new electrical circuits.
 - e) Minor residential plumbing work, including sewer repair and replacement, replumbing of supply and drainage piping, and fixture replacement.
 - f) Photovoltaic and energy storage systems.
 - g) Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
 - h) All inspections for the permitting of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or junior accessory dwelling units (JADUs) under 800 square feet, except for inspections related to the following:
 - i) Foundation, including but not limited to, rebar reinforcement, anchor bolts, soil preparation, trench depth, and utility placement.
 - ii) Framing, including but not limited to, wall and roof.
 - i) Home hardening and defensible space, including improvements to comply with the California Wildland-Urban Interface Code (Part 7 of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations).
- 2) Requires, by July 1, 2027, a city or county to offer a homeowner or contractor the option of requesting a remote inspection for all or a subset of the inspections required by a building permit for any of the following in single- or two-family dwelling units, subject to the discretion of the construction inspector:

- a) Drywall.
 - b) Exterior siding.
 - c) Insulation.
 - d) Signs.
 - e) Window replacements.
 - f) Light foundations and footings.
 - g) Fireplace inserts.
 - h) Patios or decks.
 - i) Temporary power poles.
 - j) Demolition.
 - k) Removing gas lines.
 - l) Residential additions under 800 square feet.
 - m) Storage sheds under 800 square feet.
- 3) Requires the remote inspections specified in this bill to be conducted offsite, with the homeowner or contractor using videoconferencing or recorded photos and videos, at the discretion of the local construction inspector.
 - 4) Allows a city or county to keep a digital record of the remote inspection conducted pursuant to this bill for later review, training, or compliance.
 - 5) Allows, if a homeowner or contractor fails a remote inspection required by a building permit conducted pursuant to this bill, a construction inspector, at their discretion, to conduct future inspections required by that building permit remotely or in person.
 - 6) Requires a city or county to offer a remote inspection at no greater cost and with no greater delay than in-person inspection.
 - 7) Requires all liabilities and immunities applicable to cities and counties and their employees to apply to remote inspections, as specified.
 - 8) Allows a city or county, at their discretion, to set up a process to perform onsite audits to confirm that a homeowner or contractor accurately represented the work that is subject of a remote inspection. If the homeowner or contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work that is the subject of a remote inspection, a city or county may temporarily ban the homeowner or contractor from using a remote inspection. A city or county may enter into

agreements with other cities and counties to enforce each other's temporary homeowner or contractor bans.

- 9) Requires a city or county to include information on its remote inspection program in its annual progress reports (APRs) submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), beginning with the report due April 1, 2028. This information shall confirm that the city or county has implemented a remote inspection program in compliance with this bill, and shall include all of the following:
 - a) The number of inspections for different types of permits that are done remotely and in person.
 - b) The failure rates of remote and in-person inspections for different types of permits.
 - c) The number of audits conducted of remote inspections for different types of permits.
- 10) Provides that no reimbursement is required by this bill pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because a local agency or school district has the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to pay for the program or level of service mandated by this bill, as specified.
- 11) Provides that the oversight of permitting and inspections is a matter of statewide concern and is not a municipal affair as that term is used in Section 5 of Article XI of the California Constitution and, therefore, this bill applies to all cities, including charter cities.
- 12) Contains a number of findings and declarations regarding its purpose.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Allows a city or county to “make and enforce within its limits, all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.” (California Constitution, Article XI, Section 7)
- 2) Establishes State Housing Law to assure the availability of affordable housing and uniform statewide code enforcement to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and occupants of housing and accessory buildings. (Health & Safety Code (HSC) 17910 - 17998.3)
- 3) Establishes the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC) within the Department of General Services, which requires CBSC to approve and adopt building standards and codify those standards in the California Building Standards Code. (HSC 18930)
- 4) Authorizes any officer, employee, or agent of an enforcement agency to enter and inspect any building or premises whenever necessary to secure compliance with, or prevent violation of, State Housing Law, the California Building Standards Code, and other rules and regulations. (HSC 17970)

- 5) Requires the building department of a local government to complete inspections of permitted residential work for projects containing 1-10 residential units that are no more than 40' tall within 10 business days of receiving notice of completion. (HSC 17970.3)
- 6) Allows the governing body of any county or city, including a charter city, to prescribe fees for permits, certificates, or other forms or documents required or authorized by State Housing Law or rules and regulations adopted pursuant to State Housing Law, and prohibits these fees from exceeding the amount reasonably required to administer or process these permits, certificates, or other forms or documents, or to defray the costs of enforcement required by State Housing Law to be carried out by local enforcement agencies, as specified. (HSC 17951)
- 7) Requires, if the local enforcement agency fails to conduct an inspection of permitted work for which permit fees have been charged pursuant to 6), above, within 60 days of receiving notice of the completion of the permitted work, the permittee to be entitled to reimbursement of the permit fees. The local enforcement agency shall disclose in clear language on each permit or on a document that accompanies the permit that the permittee may be entitled to reimbursement of permit fees. (HSC 17951)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill is keyed fiscal and contains a state-mandated local program.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Author's Statement.** According to the author, "Like many of you, I'm a homeowner, and have also experienced the frustration of waiting weeks for an inspection on a simple home renovation. Even once the inspection date is booked, a routine inspection that only takes 15 minutes can take hours, forcing homeowners to take a day off work and a day of lost pay. Even beyond the money lost from missing work, the cost of delaying these inspections can also cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars.

"AB 1738 proposes an alternative to this, by giving homeowners the choice to request a remote virtual inspection for simple home renovations. These remote inspections are already happening throughout the state; 19 different jurisdictions already offer some form of remote inspections. This bill will require local jurisdictions to allow remote virtual inspections upon request for simple renovations. This is a simple, commonsense affordability measure that will help homeowners save time and money."

- 2) **Bill Summary.** This bill requires counties and cities, including charter cities, to offer the option of remote building inspections for certain residential projects in single- or two-family dwelling units by July 1, 2027.

This bill separates the types of projects into two categories:

- a) Remote inspections *must* be allowed for this category of projects, which includes: residential water heaters; residential heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems; residential reroofs; minor residential electrical work, including main and subservice panels, rewire work, whole-house fans, ceiling fans, and new electrical circuits; minor residential plumbing work, including sewer repair and replacement, replumbing of supply and drainage piping, and fixture replacement; photovoltaic and energy storage systems;

smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; all inspections for the permitting of accessory dwelling units ADUs or JADUs under 800 square feet, with specified exceptions; and, home hardening and defensible space.

- b) Remote inspections remain *at the discretion of the construction inspector* for this category of projects, which includes: drywall; exterior siding; insulation; signs; window replacements; light foundations and footings; fireplace inserts; patios or decks; temporary power poles; demolition; removing gas lines; residential additions under 800 square feet; and, storage sheds under 800 square feet.

This bill requires these remote inspections to be conducted offsite with the homeowner or contractor using videoconferencing or recorded photos and videos. The type of communication used is at the discretion of the local construction inspector. Jurisdictions may maintain digital records of remote inspections for later review, training or compliance. If a homeowner or contractor fails a remote inspection, a construction inspector may conduct future inspections required by that building permit remotely or in person.

This bill requires a city or county to offer a remote inspection at no greater cost and with no greater delay than in-person inspections. It also requires all liabilities and immunities applicable to cities, counties, and their employees to apply to a remote inspection.

This bill allows a city or county to perform onsite audits to confirm that a homeowner or contractor accurately represented the work that is the subject of a remote inspection. If the homeowner or contractor is found to have willfully misrepresented the work that is the subject of a remote inspection, a city or county may temporarily ban the homeowner or contractor from using a remote inspection. A city or county may enter into agreements with other cities or counties to enforce each other's temporary homeowner or contractor bans.

This bill requires, as part of the APRs that local governments complete and send to the HCD, a report that confirms that the city or county has implemented a remote inspection program in compliance with this bill. This must be done beginning with the report due April 1, 2028. The report must include the following:

- c) The number of inspections for different types of permits that are done remotely and in person.
- d) The failure rates of remote and in-person inspections for different types of permits.
- e) The number of audits conducted of remote inspections for different types of permits

This bill is sponsored by Permit Power and SPUR.

- 3) **Background.** In 1962, the Legislature enacted State Housing Law, which provides requirements and procedures for uniform statewide code enforcement to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and occupants of housing and accessory buildings. Among other things, State Housing Law delegates responsibility to state administrative agencies for the adoption of building standards, applies state building codes uniformly, and directs local agencies' administration of code enforcement.

- 4) **Building Codes.** The California Building Standards Code contains building standards and regulations as adopted by the CBSC. These standards include, among other requirements, structural standards for building safety (the Building Code), fire safety standards (the Fire Code), energy efficiency standards (the Energy Code), and standards for green buildings (CalGreen).

The CBSC updates the Building Standards Code on a three-year cycle. Once adopted at the state level, cities and counties are required to adopt the Building Standards Code by ordinance, typically to make local administrative provisions or amendments, but they generally cannot modify state building standards unless they make express findings based on local climatic, geological, or topographical conditions. New construction and improvements to existing buildings must comply with the current building codes, and improvements to an existing building may trigger additional code upgrades for other parts of the building.

In 2025, the housing budget trailer bill (AB 130 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 22, Statutes of 2025) paused the adoption of most new or amended residential building standards by the CBSC until June 1, 2031, effectively freezing the residential building code during that period except for emergency health and safety standards, wildfire requirements, climate resilience measures as part of an adopted greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy, and other limited statutory updates required by state or federal law.

Existing law requires the building department of every city or county to enforce the provisions of the State Housing Law, the California Building Standards Code, and the other specified rules and regulations promulgated pursuant to the State Housing Law.

- 5) **Housing Approval Process.** Planning for, and approving, new housing developments is primarily a local responsibility. Under the California Constitution, cities and counties have broad authority, known as the police power, to regulate land use in the interest of public health, safety, and welfare. Local governments enforce this authority through an entitlement process, which includes both discretionary and ministerial approvals. Gaining “entitlement” is essentially a local government’s confirmation that a housing project conforms to all applicable local zoning regulations and design standards. For discretionary projects, environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is often required as part of the entitlement process. CEQA can influence project design, add mitigation requirements, or delay approval if significant environmental impacts are identified.

Once a project receives entitlement, or approval, from the local planning department, it must obtain post entitlement permits, such as building, demolition, and grading permits. Post entitlement permits are related to the physical construction of the development proposal before construction can begin.

- 6) **Residential Construction Inspections.** After permits are issued and construction begins, the construction phase involves a separate layer of local government oversight through building inspections. These inspections ensure that the actual construction work complies with approved plans, building codes, and safety regulations. Local agency inspectors review critical aspects of construction and various scopes of work, such as structural components, electrical and plumbing systems, fire safety measures, energy efficiency, and accessibility requirements at multiple stages of the project. Inspections occur throughout construction,

from foundation and framing through final inspection and issuance of a certificate of occupancy, ensuring building safety and compliance with the approved set of plans.

In 2025, the Legislature enacted AB 1308 (Hoover), Chapter 509, Statutes of 2025, to ensure timely building inspections for smaller residential projects. The bill requires local building departments to conduct a building inspection within 10 business days of receiving notice that permitted work is completed for certain small-scale residential construction projects, defined as buildings with one to ten units that are up to 40 feet tall. AB 1308 applies to building permits issued for both new construction of, and residential additions to, these smaller residential projects. If a local agency fails to meet the statutory inspection deadline, the delay constitutes a violation of the Housing Accountability Act. AB 1308 was intended to provide greater certainty and inspection expediency during the construction phase for smaller residential development projects.

- 7) **Remote Virtual Inspections (RVIs).** Remote Virtual Inspections (RVIs) allow building inspectors to review permitted construction work without being physically present at the jobsite. Instead, the inspection is conducted using video, photographs, or similar technology while a contractor, property owner, or other representative is present at the site and follows the inspector's directions, or records media to be sent to the inspector. RVIs do not establish a different legal standard of inspection, but rather a different method for conducting an inspection required under existing building and safety laws.

National organizations have issued guidance and best practices related to the use of RVIs, although these materials generally do not create binding requirements for local building departments. The International Code Council (ICC) has published Recommended Practices for Remote Virtual Inspections, which describes procedural considerations such as verifying permit status, ensuring adequate connectivity and visibility, maintaining appropriate documentation, and recording inspection results in the jurisdiction's permit-tracking system. The document states that it is provided for informational purposes and does not supersede building codes or local policies. Further, as the bill's findings note, the ICC's best practices provide that "all inspections may qualify for an RVI, depending on the authority having jurisdiction's resources and policies."

Similarly, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has published guidance outlining administrative and technical considerations for RVIs, such as determining which inspection types are appropriate for remote review, addressing safety considerations, and establishing procedures for documentation and technology use. These materials are framed as best practices and guidance rather than enforceable standards. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has also issued program guidance allowing remote video inspections for units using the federal Housing Choice Voucher program for purposes of conducting Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections, which assess habitability and safety conditions, not general construction inspections. The guidance directs public housing agencies to develop their own procedures while ensuring proper documentation and verification.

The use of RVIs expanded in some jurisdictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, when local governments adopted remote options to maintain inspection services while limiting in-person contact. Some jurisdictions have continued to offer RVIs following the pandemic, while others have returned primarily to in-person inspections.

Approximately 19 out of the 540 jurisdictions in California currently allow some use of RVIs for portions of their inspection workload. For example, the City of Sacramento offers virtual inspections for certain residential permits, including minor HVAC work, water heater replacement, solar photovoltaic systems, EV charger installations, and some reroof inspections. Other jurisdictions, such as Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, and Placer County, similarly allow remote inspections for eligible permits at the discretion of the local building inspector. Los Angeles County offers RVIs for the insulation inspection for new construction ADUs, while requiring in-person inspections for the remaining construction phases.

In practice, the types of work most commonly inspected remotely tend to be relatively standardized inspection types, including limited-scope mechanical, electrical, or plumbing work; solar installations; minor equipment replacements; and re-inspections. More complex inspections, such as those involving structural work, foundations, framing, or projects requiring detailed field verification, are generally still conducted in person in most cases.

Other states have also authorized the use of remote inspections in statute or policy. Florida allows enforcement agencies to conduct virtual inspections for certain projects, including some new construction, while prohibiting their use for structural inspections on large “threshold” buildings. Some local jurisdictions in Arizona and Texas have implemented similar programs that allow remote inspections for defined residential scopes of work, such as water heaters, electrical service upgrades, or minor plumbing repairs. These examples illustrate how RVIs have been successfully adopted in other states, generally for limited-scope inspections, while more complex inspections continue to occur through in-person site visits.

- 8) **Related Legislation.** AB 2418 (Mark González) requires, until January 1, 2037, local agencies to contract with or employ, or allow an applicant to retain, a private provider to check plans and specifications for specified nonresidential buildings if there is an excessive delay in the local agency’s estimate or performance of this function; specifies requirements for fees that local agencies may prescribe for nonresidential building permits; and, requires inspections of specified nonresidential buildings or structures to be conducted within 10 business days of a notice of completion of permitted work for those projects. AB 2418 is pending in this Committee.
- 9) **Previous Legislation.** AB 1308 (Hoover), Chapter 509, Statutes of 2025, required the building department of every city or county to conduct an inspection of permitted work within 10 business days of receiving notice of the completion of permitted work authorized by a building permit issued for specified housing projects.
- 10) **Arguments in Support.** Permit Power and SPUR, co-sponsors of this bill, state, “California faces an urgent housing affordability crisis and an equally urgent need to accelerate climate resilience and clean energy deployment. Outdated permitting and inspection processes—particularly long wait times for routine inspections that take 5-15 minutes—are quietly but significantly driving up costs, slowing new housing production, and delaying clean energy upgrades for California families.

“Remote inspections are a proven, cost-effective solution. RVIs allow building inspectors to conduct inspections using live video, recorded video, or photos for eligible projects such as

water heaters, HVAC systems, solar and battery installations, minor electrical and plumbing work, ADUs, and re-inspections. These inspections maintain full safety and code compliance while reducing unnecessary travel, scheduling inefficiencies, and backlogs.

“Remote inspections are already working across California. At least 19 jurisdictions, small and large—including Los Angeles County, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Berkeley, Santa Rosa, and Placer County—use RVIs for portions of their inspection workload. Statewide and national authorities, including the International Code Council, HUD, and the National Fire Protection Association, have issued standards and best practices supporting their use. Other states, including Texas and Florida, have authorized or required remote inspections in statute.

“The evidence is clear:

- Contractors routinely wait hours for inspections that take minutes, adding \$600–\$1,000 per inspection in standby and administrative costs.
- RVIs save inspectors, contractors, and homeowners as much as 3 hours per inspection by eliminating travel time and reducing idle gaps.
- Jurisdictions report conducting significantly more inspections per day, reducing backlogs, and improving predictability for contractors and homeowners.
- Compliance and pass/fail rates for remote inspections are comparable to in-person inspections when used for appropriate project types and paired with quality controls.
- RVIs free up limited inspection capacity to focus on new housing construction and post-disaster rebuilding—directly supporting faster, lower-cost housing production.

“This is a crucial tool if California wants to meet its electrification and housing construction goals. RVIs remove friction at critical bottlenecks for electrification and renewable energy projects, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and help accelerate deployment of heat pumps, solar, and resilience retrofits.

“This bill takes a balanced, common-sense approach. It preserves inspectors’ discretion to require in-person inspections when warranted, standardizes eligibility and best practices statewide, and ensures safety and accountability through clear protocols and oversight.

“Modernizing inspections is one of the fastest, lowest-cost ways California can cut red tape, lower housing and clean energy costs, and make government work better for residents and local agencies alike.”

- 11) **Arguments in Opposition.** The California Building Officials, in opposition, write, “As you know, AB 1738 opens with declarations. However, many of these declarations come from a time when remote inspections were necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the reference to the City of Palo Alto and the long lead time for inspections to be completed was from a 2021 study during the global pandemic. Since that time, two additional inspectors have been hired by the city and business as usual has resumed. The current lead time in the City of Palo Alto, as of today, is a next-day turnaround from request to inspection. Further,

nearly all jurisdictions statewide conduct inspections on the business day following the request by the contractor or homeowner.

“As we get into the list of inspections that would be mandated for remote option by all California local building departments, we have grave concerns with not only the myriad of the type of inspections included in AB 1738, but the very premise starting with the catastrophic life-safety statistical consequences...

“The expansion of remote inspections to complex building systems also introduces significant risk to the life safety of California residents. Building inspections are intended to verify that critical systems protecting occupants—gas connections, electrical infrastructure, structural components, fire separations, and energy storage systems—are installed correctly and safely before they are concealed or placed into service. Remote inspection methods inherently limit an inspector’s ability to fully evaluate workmanship, identify hidden deficiencies, verify measurements, test equipment, and observe conditions outside of a limited camera view. Subtle issues such as improper venting, loose gas fittings, undersized wiring, improper clearances, or compromised fire-resistive assemblies may not be visible through a mobile device camera. When these deficiencies go undetected, the consequences can be catastrophic, including gas leaks, electrical fires, structural failure, or other life-threatening hazards. For these reasons, requiring remote inspection options for complex systems without allowing local Building Officials to determine when an in-person inspection is necessary could unintentionally place millions of Californians at greater risk.

“Some building departments have made routine use of remote and virtual inspections. We commend their approach in finding ways to make innovative practices work for their community. We routinely share their practices with our larger membership and commend their work, but that does not mean that it is a proverbial fit for all communities. As one member of our Board cited, when it comes to a virtual inspection via FaceTime, it’s not what the contractor is showing you, it is what they are not showing outside of the camera view. It simply means that building departments need discretion with how remote and virtual inspections are offered. Making the permitting and inspection process more arbitrary, or a ‘box’ to check, is not going to net in an increase in requested services as outlined within AB 1738. It simply diminishes the process of inspection and the life-safety role of the code official.

“There is nothing to prohibit a local building department from moving forward with remote or virtual inspections without mandate. We appreciate the guidelines offered by the International Code Council (ICC) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and routinely encourage our members to reference these materials. As CALBO, we are not anti-remote inspection. Rather, we feel that a one-size fits all approach to inspection services is a disservice to 40 million+ diverse Californians and the local building departments that provide public safety services on their behalf. Perhaps a more meaningful path forward would be to offer tools, such as grants, to local government enabling their ability to provide remote services. This could include opportunities to purchase equipment (costly camera drones) or train essential staff on the nuances of remote inspection.”

- 12) **Double-Referral.** This bill is double-referred to the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee, where it passed on a 12-0 vote on March 25, 2026.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Permit Power [CO-SPONSOR]
SPUR [CO-SPONSOR]
350 Bay Area Action
350 Humboldt
Abundant Housing Los Angeles
Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet
Activesgv
All-electric California
Apartment Association of Orange County
California Center for Sustainable Energy
California Climate Action
California Yimby
Casita Coalition
City of Pico Rivera
Cleaneart4kids.org
Climate Action California
Climate Resolve
East Bay Rental Housing Association
Fresnans Against Fracking
Housing Action Coalition
Los Angeles Climate Reality Project
Megafire Action
Menlo Spark
National Resources Defense Council
Palisades Recovery Coalition
Redwood Energy
Regional Asthma Management and Prevention (RAMP)
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
South Pasadena Residents for Responsible Growth
The Climate Center
The Two Hundred for Homeownership
US Green Building Council-California
Vector Green Power, LLC
Zillow Group

Opposition

California Building Officials

Analysis Prepared by: Angela Mapp / L. GOV. / (916) 319-3958