

Building an Affordable California Act: Real CEQA Reform for Essential Projects

California's outdated system for approving essential projects such as housing, water, clean energy, roads and health care facilities is too slow, too bureaucratic and too costly—**driving up the cost of living for all families.**

The **Building an Affordable California Act (BACA)** modernizes the state's outdated approval process to **deliver essential projects faster and more affordably**—while maintaining California's strong environmental, tribal and worker protections.

The Act streamlines approvals for essential projects, including:

- **Housing:** Single-family homes, apartments, master-planned communities, senior and student housing, transitional and supportive housing, farmworker housing, and conversions of existing commercial buildings to residential use.
- **Public Health:** Projects that build or modernize health care facilities—including hospitals, clinics, and medical office buildings.
- **Water:** Projects that deliver clean drinking water and improve California's water systems—dams, pipelines, recycling plants, stormwater capture, and other infrastructure identified in the State's Water Resilience Portfolio.
- **Clean Energy:** Projects that support California's clean energy, reliability, and climate goals—including solar, wind, geothermal, small hydro, clean hydrogen, battery storage, and upgrades to the electric grid, transmission, and distribution systems—plus EV charging and electrification projects.
- **Education Facilities:** Projects owned or operated by public or nonprofit educational institutions, including classrooms, labs, faculty offices, and research centers.
- **Public Safety & Wildfire Resilience:** Building or upgrading fire and police stations, vegetation management, fuel reduction, undergrounding utility lines, home hardening, and creating or maintaining fuel breaks.
- **Transportation:** Projects that improve traffic flow, safety, or access to public transit—including roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit upgrades, as well as EV charging infrastructure.
- **Broadband & Digital Communication:** Projects that expand high-speed internet access—including fiber-optic and wireless broadband infrastructure to connect underserved and rural communities.

How the Act Lowers Costs and Delivers the Projects Californians Need Most

1 Enforceable Timelines for Application Completeness Determinations

- Agencies must determine application completeness within 30 days. If agency fails to issue a written determination within 30 calendar days, the application is deemed complete.
- If agency determines that the application is not complete, agency must provide an exhaustive list of items needed for the application to be deemed complete.

- Any future determination of application incompleteness in subsequent rounds of review must be limited to the items included on this exhaustive list.
- Applicant then has 90 days to revise or supplement the application, at which point the process repeats, with the agency again under a 30 day deadline to determine application completeness.
- Applicant has right to appeal incompleteness to higher agency decision-making body, which must issue a final written determination on the appeal within 60 calendar days. Applicants have the right to challenge appeal determination in court.

2 Vested Rights and Evidence-Based Review

- Essential project must be evaluated based on the laws (including statutes, regulations, and ordinances) and written standards that existed at the time of application submittal—ensuring fair and predictable treatment.
- For the purposes of CEQA, if a written standard exists for a particular resource area, the agency’s review must rely exclusively on that existing standard.
- Applicants may elect a streamlined alternatives analysis.
 - To be eligible, applicant must meet twice with the lead agency to discuss feasible options and propose a single project alternative.
 - Under this process, the CEQA alternatives analysis is limited to (1) the proposed project, (2) one applicant-proposed alternative, and (3) the “no project” alternative

3 Enforceable Timelines for Environmental Review Certification

- Lead agencies must decide on environmental review type within 30 business days of application completeness.
- CEQA review completion deadlines:
 - 90 days for exemptions or addenda;
 - 180 days for negative declarations; or
 - 365 days for EIRs.
- Public comment periods are limited to 20 calendar days for mitigated negative declarations and 45 calendar days for draft EIRs, and late comments are excluded from the record.
- If a lead agency fails to comply with CEQA deadlines, the applicant can request a public hearing, requiring final action within 60 calendar days.

4 Enforceable Timelines for Final Project Approval

- Lead agencies must issue a final decision on any permit, authorization, or approval concurrent with CEQA certification.
- Other permitting agencies must issue a final written decision on any permit, authorization, or approval within 90 calendar days of application completeness.
- If an agency misses a deadline, the applicant may file a written request for a public hearing, which the agency must hold with 45 calendar days to approve or deny the project.

5 Fairer, Evidence-Based Judicial Review Standards

- Any legal challenge to an essential project on CEQA grounds must demonstrate the CEQA document failed to comply with objective, quantifiable, and written standards as they existed on the date of the application.
- Any lawsuit must be filed within 30 calendar days of the lead agency's notice of determination or notice of exemption, and must be completed within 270 calendar days, including appeals.
- Courts must defer to agency expertise under the substantial evidence standard and interpret BACA liberally to favor essential project approval for all CEQA documents, including negative declarations.

Maintains California's Strong Environmental, Tribal and Worker Protections

- **Environmental Protections:** BACA does not weaken or exempt any project from existing environmental protections. The Act simply modernizes the process—setting clear timelines, preventing frivolous lawsuits by those seeking to delay essential projects, and ensuring reviews are faster, more transparent, and focused on results.

All state and federal protections remain intact, including the:

- Endangered Species Act,
 - Safe Drinking Water Act,
 - Toxic Substances Control Act
 - Clean Water Act,
 - Clean Air Act,
 - Environmental Quality Improvement Act,
 - Global Warming Solutions Act,
 - California Coastal Act,
 - Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.
- **Tribal Protections:** The Act also fully protects the tribal consultation process for federally-recognized tribes required under Assembly Bill 52, while creating earlier opportunities for meaningful tribal engagement—ensuring tribes are consulted before key project decisions are made.
 - **Worker Protections:** All essential projects are subject to the state's strongest labor standards. Essential housing projects must meet the same labor standards required under the recently enacted CEQA exemption for infill housing in Assembly Bill 130. All other essential projects must comply with the labor standards applicable to environmental leadership development projects described in Section 21183.5.



YES on the Building an Affordable California Act

Streamlines Approvals to Build Essential Projects Faster and Make California More Affordable

The Problem

Lengthy Delays and Red Tape are Blocking Essential Projects & Driving Up California's Cost of Living

California's outdated system for approving essential projects such as housing, water infrastructure, clean energy, roads and health care facilities is too slow, too bureaucratic and too costly—**driving up the cost of living for all families.**

Established more than 50 years ago, **this broken system now blocks essential projects, undermines California's climate goals, and increases costs for us all:**

- X Housing:** Permitting and approval delays add an average of more than **\$75,000** to the cost of a new single-family home in California—pushing rents and mortgages higher.
- X Infrastructure:** Bureaucratic delays add billions in taxpayer and consumer costs for hospitals, roads, bridges, water systems, and renewable energy projects.
- X Environment:** Projects that would reduce air pollution, prevent wildfires, and reduce emissions are trapped in seemingly endless reviews and litigation.

The Solution

The **Building an Affordable California Act** modernizes the state's outdated approval process to **build essential projects faster and more affordably.**

The Act will:

- ✓ **Streamline reviews and eliminate costly delays.**
- ✓ **Curb frivolous lawsuits** that block essential projects.
- ✓ **Create tens of thousands of good-paying jobs.**
- ✓ **Protect California's strong environmental, worker and tribal cultural resources protection standards.**

Streamlines approvals for essential projects, including:

-  Clean drinking water and water supply projects.
-  Hospitals, clinics and other health care facilities.
-  Roads, bridges, transit and other transportation infrastructure.
-  Wildfire prevention and resilience projects.
-  Housing, including single and multi-family housing.
-  Schools, classrooms, and educational facilities.
-  Clean energy generation, transmission and storage.
-  Broadband and telecommunications infrastructure.

How the Act Lowers Costs and Delivers the Projects Californians Need Most



Streamlined Approvals—More Predictability & Accountability

- **Reasonable, Enforceable Timelines:** Agencies must approve or deny project applications within **365 days**. If the deadline is missed, applicants may request a **public hearing or workshop** where a final decision must be made within 60 days.
- **Objective Standards:** Agencies must base their review on clear, written rules—like local ordinances, environmental laws or zoning standards—that were in place when the application was submitted.
- **Public Comment:** Establishes a **firm 45-day public comment period** with written responses to all timely comments—ensuring public participation and accountability.
- **Streamlined Alternatives:** Narrows the “alternatives” requirement to two: one feasible alternative project design that reduces environmental impacts, and one describing a “no project” scenario.



Fairer Reviews—Faster, Evidence-Based Process

- **Judicial Shot Clock:** Courts must fully resolve legal challenges within 270 days.
- **Fix What’s Broken:** If one part of an environmental review document is rejected, only that section must be fixed—allowing the rest of the project to move forward on schedule.
- **Objective Standards:** Courts may only overturn project approvals if agencies ignore clear, written rules—like zoning or environmental standards—that were in place when the application was submitted.
- **Evidence-Based Review:** Courts must uphold a project's approval if the agency's decision was supported by substantial evidence.

Every year of delay means Californians will wait longer and pay more for the essential projects our communities need most. It's time to cut red tape, protect our environment and build projects that make life more affordable for everyone.

Vote YES on the Building an Affordable California Act

[Read the Measure HERE](#)



Building an Affordable California Act: Frequently Asked Questions

What does this measure do?

The Building an Affordable California Act modernizes the state's outdated approval process to deliver essential projects faster and more affordably—while maintaining California's strong environmental laws and protections. The Act creates enforceable timelines, streamlines approvals, and limits frivolous lawsuits to reduce the cost of homes, healthcare, and electricity while jumpstarting projects that create good-paying jobs and put more Californians to work.

Why is the measure needed?

California's outdated system for approving essential projects is too slow, too bureaucratic and too costly—driving up the cost of living for all families. Established more than 50 years ago, this broken system now blocks essential projects, undermines California's climate goals, and increases costs for us all. Agency reviews can drag on for years, while frivolous lawsuits add even more delays and uncertainty. These delays make housing, electricity, and health care more expensive and slow down progress on clean energy, wildfire prevention, and water infrastructure that Californians depend on every day. We need to reform this outdated system to reduce costs and build the essential projects California needs.

How will BACA help bring down the cost of living?

Lengthy delays force Californians to wait longer and pay more for needed housing, energy, water, and other essential infrastructure. Every month a project is delayed, costs go up—from financing and legal fees to materials and labor. For example, permitting delays add more than \$75,000 to the cost of a new home and billions to the cost of hospitals, water systems, roads, bridges, and clean energy projects—costs that ultimately fall on consumers and taxpayers. By setting enforceable timelines, streamlining approvals, and limiting frivolous lawsuits—while maintaining California's strong environmental and worker protections—BACA helps cut red tape, build faster, reduce costs, and make life more affordable for everyone.

What kinds of projects does this measure apply to?

The Act applies only to essential projects that lower costs, protect the environment, and improve quality of life.

That includes:

- **Housing:** Single-family homes, apartments, senior and student housing, transitional and supportive housing, farmworker housing, and conversions of existing commercial buildings to residential use.
- **Public Health:** Projects that build or modernize health care facilities including hospitals, clinics, and medical office buildings.
- **Water:** Projects that deliver clean drinking water and improve California's water systems—dams, pipelines, recycling plants, stormwater capture, and other infrastructure identified in the State's Water Resilience Portfolio.
- **Clean Energy:** Projects that support California's clean energy, reliability, and climate goals—including solar, wind, geothermal, small hydro, clean hydrogen, battery storage, fuel cells, clean carbon capture, upgrades to the electric grid, transmission, and distribution systems—plus EV charging and electrification projects.
- **Education Facilities:** Projects that build or modernize educational facilities, including K–12 schools, charter schools, community colleges, CSU/UC campuses, private colleges and universities, labs, and other student support facilities.
- **Public Safety & Wildfire Resilience:** Building or upgrading fire and police stations, vegetation management, fuel reduction, moving utility lines underground, home hardening, and creating or maintaining fuel breaks.
- **Transportation:** Projects that improve traffic flow, safety, or access to public transit including roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit upgrades as well as EV charging infrastructure.
- **Broadband & Digital Communication:** Projects that expand high-speed internet access including fiber-optic and wireless broadband infrastructure to connect underserved and rural communities.

Does this measure weaken environmental laws?

No. The Act keeps all of California's strongest environmental protections fully in place. It does not weaken or exempt any project from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, California Coastal Act, Endangered Species Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, or California's Global Warming Solutions Act. Projects must still complete full CEQA review and meet every applicable environmental standard. The Act simply modernizes the process—setting clear timelines, preventing frivolous lawsuits, and ensuring reviews are faster, more transparent, and focused on results. That means California can build the clean energy, housing, and infrastructure projects we need—without sacrificing our air, water, or natural resources.

Does this measure reduce local control or public input?

No. Local governments keep full authority to approve or deny projects in their communities. The Act simply ensures those decisions are made within one year—not after years of delay. It also protects public participation, requiring a 45-day public comment period and written responses to all timely comments. This ensures that local voices remain part of the process while preventing bureaucratic gridlock that drives up costs. Communities will continue to shape how projects fit their neighborhoods—but with a process that’s faster, fairer, and more accountable.

How does BACA strengthen tribal consultation rights?

BACA protects and strengthens tribal consultation by requiring early engagement with California Indian tribes before project applications are submitted, incorporating Tribal Traditional Knowledge, and enhancing confidentiality protections—all while fully respecting tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government consultation process.

What worker protections are included in the Act?

Every essential project must meet California’s strongest labor standards—including fair pay, safe working conditions, and skilled-and-trained workforce requirements. Essential housing projects must meet AB 130 labor standards, and all other essential projects must comply with ELDP-level labor requirements.

Does BACA eliminate the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)?

No. CEQA remains fully operational under the Act. The Act simply streamlines how CEQA is applied to essential projects, setting clear timelines, enforceable rules to provide predictability and accountability, and establishing a faster, evidence-based process for litigation. BACA ensures CEQA works as it was intended—to protect the environment, not to block progress on essential projects.

Who decides if a project qualifies under BACA?

The same local and state agencies that approve projects today. Cities, counties, regional boards, and state departments still review, approve, or deny projects under existing environmental and land-use laws.

How does BACA help the environment?

The Act accelerates the very projects that will help California protect the environment and fight climate change. By cutting red tape for clean energy, water, and wildfire prevention, it reduces pollution, protects water supplies, and lowers carbon emissions. It helps California build a cleaner, safer, and more sustainable future—faster.

Could this measure lead to unchecked development?

No. The Act applies only to essential projects and keeps in place every existing protection for California's most sensitive and protected lands. Projects must still comply with the Coastal Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, and laws protecting wetlands, wildlife habitat, and environmentally sensitive areas. Every project must also meet local zoning, land-use, and public review requirements. The Act simply ensures those reviews happen on a clear, predictable schedule—delivering accountability and transparency, not exemptions or shortcuts—so California can build responsibly and affordably.

How is this measure different from other recent reforms?

Recent legislation has granted narrow exemptions for a short list of projects—allowing them to bypass environmental review entirely. The Act does not exempt any project from environmental review and instead delivers comprehensive reform of the state's permitting and approval process while keeping every environmental protection fully intact. It simply establishes clear, consistent standards and reasonable timelines to make the process faster, fairer, and more predictable for everyone.

Why is this on the ballot?

For decades, efforts to modernize California's outdated permitting system have stalled—leaving families to pay the price. Instead of comprehensive reform, state leaders have relied on narrow fixes for a few select projects while costs continue to skyrocket for housing, healthcare, electricity and other everyday needs. The Act gives voters the opportunity to take a truly comprehensive approach—streamlining approvals for essential projects Californians need while maintaining California's strong environmental and labor protections.



Building an Affordable California Act: A Viable Path to Meaningful CEQA Streamlining



To: Interested Parties

From: CalChamber

RE: Building an Affordable California Act—A Viable Path to Meaningful CEQA Streamlining

CalChamber has spent the past year conducting an extensive feasibility analysis to determine the viability of passing a statewide ballot measure to streamline the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). We've assembled a team of California's top ballot measure strategists, best-in-class land-use attorneys, and nationally recognized pollsters to undertake a rigorous analysis and draft a measure that is both politically viable and legally effective to streamline project approvals.

The result: the Building an Affordable California Act (BACA)—filed with the Attorney General in October—is a viable measure that would deliver the most meaningful streamlining of California's project approval process in decades—accelerating housing, clean energy, water, transportation, and infrastructure projects while maintaining California's strong labor, tribal and environmental protections.

Voters intuitively understand that endless delays and denials of essential projects not only undermine our quality of life but also drive up the cost of everything for Californians—from housing and energy to taxpayer-funded infrastructure. Voters support these streamlining reforms as a vital step to make California more affordable.

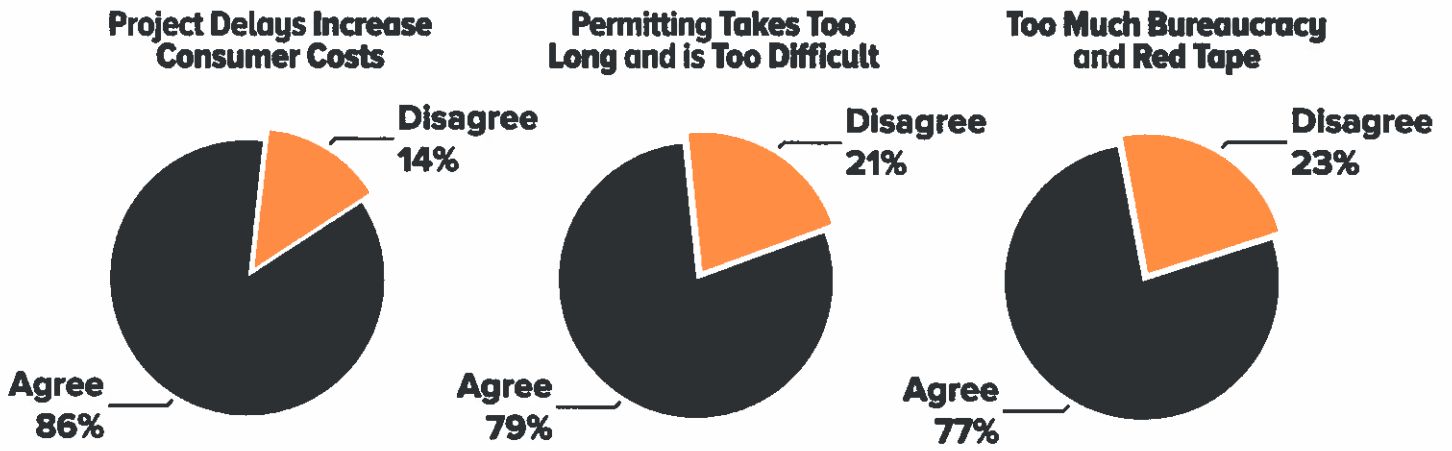
Even when simulating a campaign with tough opposition messages and hostile framing, support for BACA proved durable—with a majority of voters backing the measure, demonstrating it can withstand a real campaign.

The measure will deliver more projects, more good-paying jobs, and more opportunity—without compromising the standards that make California a leader in labor, environmental, and tribal protections.

Path to Victory

We've conducted multiple focus groups and half a dozen statewide polls to assess voter attitudes toward the need for and benefits of streamlining, as well as to test specific provisions of a measure. The findings are clear: **voters overwhelmingly agree California's permitting process is broken and strongly support solutions that make the review process faster, fairer, and more predictable.**

Voters Overwhelmingly Agree: California's Permitting Process is Broken



Voters Support Reforms that Make Review Faster, Fairer, and More Predictable

Voters support the reforms that make review faster, fairer, and more predictable. Each of the following provisions included in BACA are strongly supported by voters:

- **Enforceable Timelines (86% SUPPORT):** Agencies must complete environmental review within **90 days (exemptions/addenda), 180 days (NDs/MNDs), or 365 days (EIRs)**. If a deadline is missed, applicants may request a public hearing requiring action within 60 days. Once an application is deemed complete, all remaining permits, authorizations, and approvals must be issued within **90 days**.
- **Severance (85% SUPPORT):** If a court finds a flaw in one part of an environmental review document, only that section must be fixed—allowing the rest of the project to move forward on schedule.
- **Clear, Objective Standards (85% SUPPORT):** Agencies must base their review on clear, written rules—like local ordinances, environmental laws or zoning standards—that were in place when the application was submitted. Courts may only overturn a project's approval if the lead agency failed to follow those objective, written standards in effect at application submittal.
- **Evidence-Based Review (82% SUPPORT):** Courts must uphold a project's approval if the agency's decision was supported by substantial evidence.
- **Public Comment (80% SUPPORT):** Establishes firm public comment windows for environmental documents: 45-days for draft EIRs and 20 days for NDs/MNDs.
- **Streamlined Alternatives Analysis (65% SUPPORT):** Narrows the "alternatives" requirement to two: one feasible alternative project design that reduces environmental impacts and one describing a "no project" scenario.
- **Judicial Shot Clock (65% SUPPORT):** Sets strict timelines for lawsuits. Courts must fully resolve legal challenges within **270 days**.

Essential Projects Covered Under BACA

Voters strongly support streamlining core infrastructure—the essential projects they depend on for **affordability, reliability, and safety.**



86% SUPPORT
Clean drinking water
and water supply
projects



84% SUPPORT
Hospitals, clinics,
and other health
care facilities



76% SUPPORT
Single and multi-family
housing



76% SUPPORT
Wildfire prevention
and resilience



75% SUPPORT
Roads, bridges,
and transit



72% SUPPORT
Clean energy generation,
transmission and
storage



68% SUPPORT
Broadband and
telecommunications



Schools, classrooms,
and educational facilities

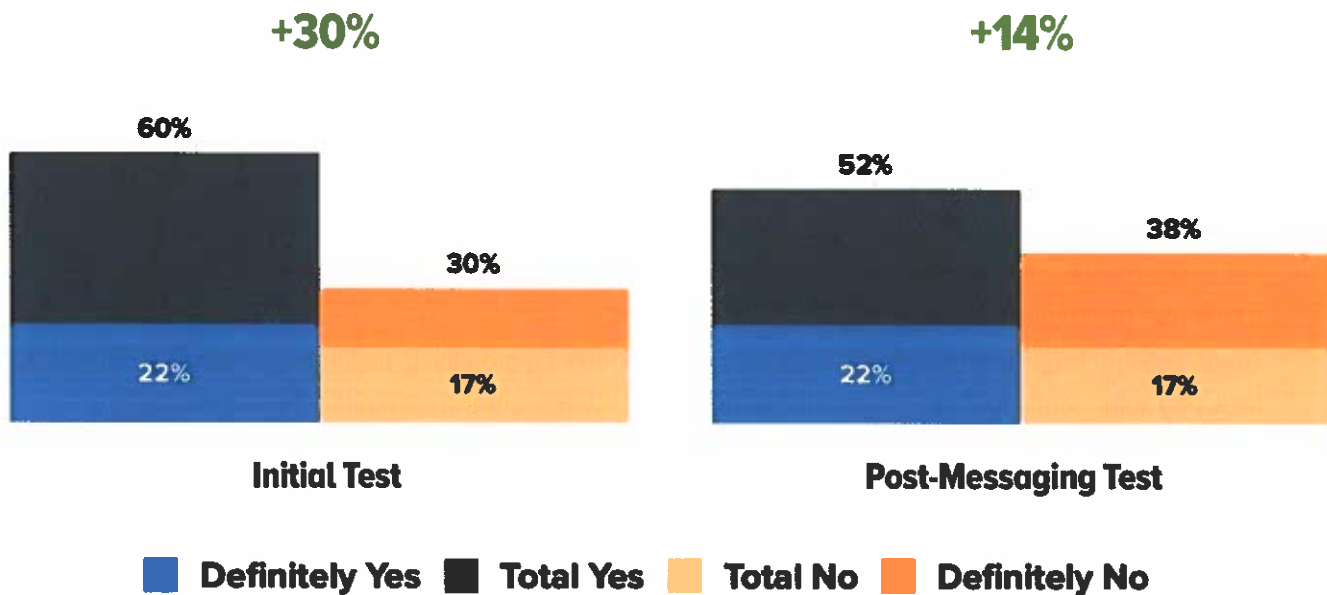
NOTE: Streamlining also covers all ancillary infrastructure that serves or connects essential projects—including utilities, water, transit, and public safety facilities—multiplying the measure's benefits by ensuring the supporting systems needed to make essential projects viable also can access streamlining reforms.

BACA Maintains California's Strong Environmental, Tribal and Worker Protections

- **Environmental Protections:** Maintains all state and federal environmental laws—including the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, and California Coastal Act—while modernizing the process to streamlined approvals and fairer, evidence-based review.
- **Tribal Protections:** Preserves and enhances AB 52 by ensuring early tribal engagement, incorporating Tribal Traditional Knowledge, and strengthening confidentiality protections—all while protecting tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government consultation process.
- **Worker Protections:** Upholds California's strongest labor standards—delivering good-paying jobs and safe job sites. Essential housing projects must meet AB 130 labor requirements, and all other essential projects must comply with ELDP-level standards.

Voter Support Holds Firm After Opposition Messaging

Even after simulating a tough campaign with strong pro and con messages, the measure proves durable. Voters buy into our core framing—streamlining essential projects—and view BACA as a commonsense reform that will make California more affordable for everyone.



BOTTOM LINE: BACA is a Strong, Politically Viable and Legally Effective Measure

California voters are hungry for solutions to build the essential projects they need—faster and more affordably. We have a winning measure and a winning team ready to push the Building an Affordable California Act across the finish line on the November 2026 ballot.



Appendix: Building an Affordable California Act Essential Projects

Essential Project Categories

- **Water:** Projects designed to protect water supply, quality, or reliability—such as building dams, water treatment plants, water recycling plants, replacing aging water pipes, capturing and storing stormwater, desalination plants, or restoring wetlands and river habitats.
- **Public Health:** Projects that build or modernize health care infrastructure—such as hospital facilities, doctor’s offices, community clinics, or ambulance service facilities.
- **Transportation:** Projects designed to improve traffic flow, road safety, or access to public transit—such as building or widening roads, bridge repairs, expanding or upgrading public transit systems, adding bike and pedestrian lanes, or installing electric vehicle charging stations.
- **Public Safety & Wildfire Resilience:** Projects that reduce wildfire risk or improve emergency response—such as building or upgrading fire and police stations, undergrounding utilities, creating community evacuation routes or emergency operations centers, or managing vegetation to prevent fires.
- **Housing:** Residential housing projects—including single-family homes, apartments, senior housing, commercial mixed-use, residential assisted living, and student housing.
- **Clean Energy:** Projects that support California’s climate goals by producing, expanding, or storing clean energy—including solar, wind, hydrogen fuel facilities, fuel cells, battery storage, microgrids, and carbon capture.
- **Broadband & Digital Communication:** Projects that expand high-speed, wireless internet access—including installing more fiber optic and cable lines, building cell towers, or creating public networks.
- **Education Facilities:** Projects that build or modernize educational facilities, including K–12 schools, community colleges, CSU/UC campuses, private colleges and universities, labs, and other student support facilities.