CalChamber

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ALERT

‘Building an Affordable California’ Ballot Initiative

Proposal seeks to modernize, streamline the California Environmental Quality Act

Last week, the California Chamber of Commerce filed a request with the Office of the Attorney General for title and summary on a ballot measure to modernize the 55-year-old law governing environmental review of infrastructure projects vital to the state’s future prosperity.

The ***Building an Affordable California*** initiative would streamline the review of essential projects under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Rather than provide piecemeal exemptions, it would establish reasonable timelines for local and state agencies to review plans and solicit public comment. Timelines would also be established for any necessary judicial review.

The initiative would ensure timely decisions are made on proposed essential projects such as housing, improvements to water supply, transportation, energy, and facilities for health and public safety.

A commentary on the initiative from CalChamber President and CEO Jennifer Barrera can be viewed on Page 3.

CalChamber intends to lead a broad and diverse coalition of leaders in clean energy, housing, transportation, and other business sectors to qualify the initiative for the statewide ballot next fall.

Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas Opens CalChamber Public Affairs Conference

Photo by Matt Lara

Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas (D-Salinas) reminds the crowd at the 2025 CalChamber Public Affairs Conference on October 29 that when government works with the business community in California, “We set the pace for the entire world.”

CalChamber Staff Promotions: Continued Support for Members, Business

Jennifer Barrera, president and CEO of the California Chamber of Commerce, this week announced the promotion of several team members for their outstanding work on behalf of CalChamber members.

Karen Mendoza has been named executive vice president for business services, after having served as a senior vice president since 2023 and more than a decade with the organization.

Hilda Watson, vice president of human resources, was named senior vice president for human resources.

Three CalChamber policy advocates were also promoted:

- Ashley Hoffman has been named vice president and deputy chief of staff for advocacy;
- Robert Moutrie will serve as vice president for advocacy; and
- Ronak Daylami will serve as vice president for advocacy focusing on privacy, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.

“CalChamber’s members have been well served by the outstanding work of Karen, Hilda, Ashley, Robert, and Ronak,” said Barrera. “Their new leadership roles will expand their value in our

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Inside

Labor Law Corner

Child Bonding Leave When Employees Work for Same Employer

Ashley Huynh
Employment Law Expert

We have two employees, Jackie and John, who are married to each other and recently had a baby. Jackie has just been released to return to work from her pregnancy-related disability after using up 10 weeks of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL). They both want to take the maximum time off for child bonding and both are eligible for leave under FMLA and California Family Rights Act (CFRA). How much leave must we provide each employee?

Family and Medical Leave Act

FMLA typically provides each eligible employee up to 12 workweeks of FMLA leave for qualified reasons in a 12-month period.

When both spouses are employed by the same employer, they are entitled only to a combined total of 12 workweeks of FMLA leave per year for the birth of a child, adopting or fostering a child, or caring for a parent with a serious health condition. (29 Code of Federal Regulations 825.201).

Child bonding must be used within the first 12 months of the birth or placement of the child.

California Family Rights Act

CFRA requires the employer to allow each parent, regardless of marital status, 12 weeks of child bonding within one year of the birth or placement of the child. (Cal. Code Regulations, Title 2, Section 11090).

Application

Determine how much FMLA and CFRA leave each employee currently has, before using child bonding. After that, determine how much of each FMLA and CFRA leave of absence each employee can use for child bonding, and designate the leave of absence.

Applying and designating each leave of absence will depend on the facts and for what purpose the employees use their leave of absence.

FMLA for Jackie and John

Jackie is entitled to a full 12 weeks of FMLA for her own serious health condition. Jackie has used 10 weeks of her FMLA for that purpose when it ran concurrently with her PDL. Jackie has 2 weeks of FMLA remaining which can be used for child bonding. John has not used any FMLA yet.

The 12 weeks of FMLA leave of absence for child bonding would be shared between Jackie and John. However, because Jackie already used 10 weeks of FMLA, she has only 2 weeks left to use.

If they were to share the 12 weeks for child bonding, then the employer would designate 2 weeks of FMLA for Jackie and 10 weeks of FMLA for John.

CFRA for Jackie and John

Each parent has their own 12 weeks of child bonding under CFRA. Jackie can take up to 12 weeks of child bonding

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CalChamber-Sponsored Seminars/Trade Shows

More information at ***www.calchamber.com***.

Human Resources

Simplifying Local Ordinances: Helpful Resources for California Employers. CalChamber. December 4, Free Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

An Employer's Playbook for ICE Audits & Workplace Raids. CalChamber. Webinar on Demand. (800) 331-8877.

2026 Employment Law Updates. CalChamber. January 8–22, 2026, Virtual Seminar. (800) 331-8877.

2026 Employment Law Updates. CalChamber. January 29, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

California Employers' Guide to AI Decision Making. CalChamber. February 19, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

HR Boot Camp. CalChamber. February 26–27, April 23–24, June 4–5, September 10–11, 2026, Virtual Seminar. (800) 331-8877.

Navigating Paid Sick Leave & Time Off Requests in California. March 5, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

Leaves of Absence. CalChamber. March 26–27, May 7–8, August 6–7, 2026, Virtual Seminar. (800) 331-8877.

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Annual Meeting

In compliance with Article III of the bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the members of the California Chamber of Commerce, a mutual benefit corporation operating under the laws of the State of California, will be held on Friday, December 5, 2025 at 9 a.m. in The Social at The Estate at Yountville, 6481 Washington Street, Yountville, California, for the transaction of whatever business may be necessary.

Let's Build an Affordable California


Jennifer Barrera

It's politically popular these days to talk about making the Golden State more affordable, perhaps because we can no longer ignore the impossibly high hurdles standing in the way of the California Dream.

We've fallen too far behind in building the infrastructure that our communities desperately need. And the projects that make it through the broken permitting process become so expensive that they raise costs for all of us.

It wasn't supposed to be this way.

In 1970, lawmakers created the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and promised "productive harmony to fulfill the social and economic requirements of present and future generations."

Sadly, that promise was broken long ago.

California's future is being held back by its past.

The 'Building an Affordable California Act'

The California Chamber of Commerce has filed a voter initiative to modernize and streamline the review process for building the state's most essential projects.

The initiative was carefully crafted to protect the environment while ensuring that plans for much-needed housing, clean energy, reliable water supplies, and public health and safety facilities are reviewed in a timely manner.

Balance, Not Bureaucracy

For decades, oversight has too often been co-opted by obstruction, threatening the common good:

• A multifamily housing project in Contra Costa County weathered a decade of lawsuits, a ballot referendum, and more than 100 public hearings before an appeals court dismissed the CEQA objections in 2022.

• The lengthy CEQA process over plans to link electricity transmission lines to renewable energy resources in the Imperial Valley extended the project by seven years.

Commentary
By Jennifer Barrera

• A plan to move the Alameda Food Bank across the street to a new facility was delayed after two residents argued that CEQA required the preservation of a "historic" parking lot.

• When the University of California, Berkeley proposed badly needed student housing, opponents crafted a novel argument that CEQA covered the impact of noise made by students.

• Nine years passed between state officials initiating review of reinforcements of Perris Dam in Riverside County and final approval by an appeals court.

• Plans for a bicycle path near the Los Angeles River have been challenged under CEQA because opponents claim it might frighten horses that use a nearby trail.

These kinds of delays add billions of dollars in costs while making it harder to meet the state's affordability and environmental goals.

Timely Decisions, Protected Safeguards

Legislators have previously approved narrow project exemptions, but it's time to actually modernize the 55-year-old law.

The *Building an Affordable California Act* restores the "productive harmony" that's been cast aside over the past five decades:

• Essential projects would be subject to sensible, firm deadlines for environmental review.

• Government officials would have 365 days to approve or deny applications. After that, applicants could ask for a public hearing and a final vote within 60 days.

• Options to resolve concerns would be limited to either the proposed project, an alternative that reduces environmental impacts, or no project at all.

• There would be new timelines for legal challenges, too. Courts would be required to distinguish between reasonable concerns and those of activists whose "not in my backyard" viewpoints currently are allowed to delay or deny vital projects.

• Communities retain their control over approving local development. This is *not* a one-size-fits-all approach to meeting California's needs.

• Essential projects must meet the state's strong labor standards and protections.

• Important environmental protections such as mitigation, habitat protection, and public comment periods would remain in place.

The initiative will create predictability for improvements the state desperately needs – including the building of first responder facilities, wildfire resilience projects, and broadband in underserved communities.

Californians deserve a law that recognizes prosperity isn't the enemy of preservation.

Modernizing that law won't just ease California's affordability crisis and boost our economy – it will prove the naysayers wrong about our state.

Let's get busy. It's time to build an affordable California.

Jennifer Barrera is president and chief executive officer of the California Chamber of Commerce.

First-Term Legislators Share Perspectives at Public Affairs Conference

Photo by Matt Lara

The final session on October 29, the first day of the CalChamber Public Affairs Conference, gave the audience the chance to hear from some of the many first-time legislators elected in 2024. From left are moderator Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur (D-Hollywood), who was elected in 2022; first-term Assemblymembers Patrick Ahrens (D-Sunnyvale), Dr. Darshana Patel (D-San Diego), Jeff Gonzalez (R-Indio), Jessica Caloza (D-Los Angeles), and David Tangipa (R-Fresno); first-term Senator Jesse Arreguín (D-Berkeley); and moderator Senator Anna Caballero (D-Merced), who was elected to the Senate in 2018 and previously served several terms in the Assembly.

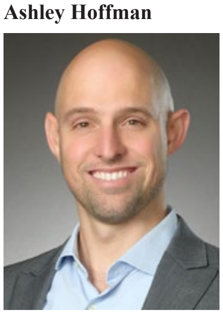
CalChamber Staff Promotions: Continued Support for Members, Business

From Page 1

mission to serve as a key voice for business in California."

Policy Advocates

Ashley Hoffman



Robert Moutrie

The promoted policy advocates played key roles in the successful legislative year recently completed and victories in past years.

Hoffman, a senior policy advocate since January 2024, joined CalChamber in August 2020 as a policy advocate. Throughout her time at CalChamber, Hoffman has led CalChamber's advocacy on labor and employment, workers' compensation and regulatory reform issues.

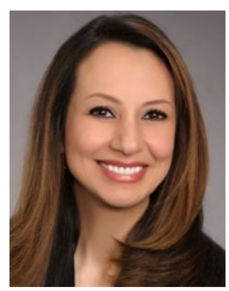
Moutrie, a senior policy advocate since January 2024, joined the CalChamber team in March 2019 as a policy advocate. He leads advocacy on occupational safety, tourism, insurance, legal reform, immigration and unemployment insurance, as well as representing employer interests on education issues.

Ronak Daylami

Daylami, an experienced attorney, joined CalChamber in March 2022 as a policy advocate specializing in privacy issues, quickly expanding to include cybersecurity and emerging technologies, as well as the legislative and regulatory framework for the ever-evolving field of artificial intelligence.

Business Services/Human Resources

Mendoza served as senior vice president of business services since October 2023. She is responsible for planning and overseeing the daily administrative, operational and technological functions of the departments within the Business Services Division. Her role also involves optimizing CalChamber operating capabilities and employing strategies to grow revenue, expand market share, deliver the best customer experience possible, maximize customer/member satisfaction, and drive innovation.



Karen Mendoza

Hilda Watson

Watson joined the CalChamber team in November 2014 as a senior human resources generalist, moving up to positions of increasing responsibility in the HR Department. She oversees all aspects of CalChamber staff management, including recruitment strategy, policy administration, employee relations, benefits, compensation, organizational development, training and office services.

Child Bonding Leave When Employees Work for Same Employer

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while John also can take up to 12 weeks of child bonding under CFRA.

Conclusion

In this scenario, for Jackie, the employer would designate 12 weeks of CFRA leave and 2 weeks of FMLA leave running concurrently. For John, the employer would designate 12 weeks of CFRA leave and 10 weeks of FMLA leave running concurrently.

The result is that each employee would have up to 12 weeks of child bonding. Jackie would use all her FMLA and CFRA leave. John would use 10 weeks of FMLA and 12 weeks of CFRA. That means John still would have 2 weeks of FMLA leave remaining that he could use for his own serious health condition.

Column based on questions asked by callers on the Labor Law Helpline, a service to California Chamber of Commerce preferred members and above. For expert explanations of labor laws and Cal/OSHA regulations, not legal counsel for specific situations, call (800) 348-2262 or submit your question at www.hrcalifornia.com.

CalChamber-Sponsored Seminars/Trade Shows

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Workplace Violence Prevention Program Tips for 2026. CalChamber. April 16, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

Wage & Hour 101: Nonexempt/Hourly Employees. CalChamber. May 21, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

Wage & Hour 101: Exempt Employees. CalChamber. June 18, 2026, Webinar. (800) 331-8877.

Supervisor Essentials. CalChamber, July 16, 2026, Virtual Seminar. (800) 331-8877.

International Trade

California State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) Export Training Series. Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). Through March 31, 2026. Event website.

U.S.-China Clean Tech Trade Mission. GO-Biz. November 3–7, China.

California Trade Mission: Poland and Ukraine (spotlight on energy and construction sectors). GO-Biz. November 11–14, Warsaw, Poland. *tricia.utterback@gobiz.ca.gov*

California Trade Mission: India – Health Tech. GO-Biz. January 27–January 31, 2026. Mumbai & New Delhi, India. Event website.

EXIM Annual Conference. Export-Import Bank of the United States. April 29–30, 2026, Washington, D.C. Registration will open later this year.

NADEC Annual Trade Conference: Global Trade and Transition. National Association of District Export Councils. May 12–13, 2026, Nashville, Tennessee. Event website.