

ALERT

Building an Affordable California

Initiative Reaches Key Signature Threshold Early



Last week, the **Building an Affordable California Act** campaign notified the

California Secretary of State that it has surpassed the 25% signature threshold required to qualify the measure for the November 2026 ballot — reaching the milestone weeks ahead of schedule.

The early achievement reflects strong voter support for fixing California's outdated project approval system, where long delays drive up costs that ultimately are passed on to renters, homebuyers, families paying electricity and water bills, and taxpayers.

By modernizing the approval process, the measure helps California address our high cost of living by delivering essential projects faster — including housing, clean energy, water infrastructure, transportation, and schools — while keeping strong environmental and labor protections fully intact.

"Californians have too long paid the price for bureaucratic red tape and delays, and they're ready for solutions," said **Jennifer Barrera, President & CEO, California Chamber of Commerce**. "Reaching this milestone early shows voters are eager to modernize the project approval process so we can build what we need, bring costs down, and make California more affordable. We can protect the environment and good-paying jobs while delivering the essential projects California urgently needs."

Broad Coalition

The campaign is supported by a broad

and growing coalition of affordable housing advocates, civil-rights leaders, clean energy advocates, health care providers, water providers, agricultural groups, and business organizations united around a shared goal: lowering the cost of living and delivering the basics Californians depend on, according to the February 6 announcement.

"Unnecessary permitting delays drive up costs and slow the delivery of critical water infrastructure Californians depend on every day. The Building an Affordable California Act modernizes the process, providing clear timelines and accountability so we can focus investing on delivering clean, reliable water without sacrificing environmental or community protections," said **Jennifer Capitolo, Executive Director, California Water Association**.

"High costs disproportionately harm Black & Brown families and communities of color. By accelerating essential infrastructure, the Building an Affordable California Act helps lower costs and make sure communities get the basic services they deserve," said **Rick Callender, President, NAACP California/Hawaii Conference**.

"Building clean energy faster means lower bills, cleaner air, and more reliable power. The Building an Affordable California Act delivers real benefits for Californians while keeping the state on track to meet its climate goals," said **Alex Jackson, Executive Director, American Clean Power – California**.

"California's housing shortage is one of the biggest drivers of our affordability crisis, and project delays only make it worse. The Building an Affordable

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Business Coalition Applauds Key Provisions of New PAGA Regulations



The FixPAGA Coalition, first formed

in 2021 to support needed reforms to California's Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA), issued a statement this week after the release of draft regulations to modify the filings of claims with the state's Labor and Workforce Development Agency.

The coalition said it is encouraged by much of what it has seen in the Agency's proposed regulations, noting that the reforms signed into law in 2024 will be successful only if they are carried out with effective regulations.

In particular, the coalition said it supports "the designation of law firms filing more than 200 PAGA notices in a 12-month period as 'high frequency filers' that are subject to additional administrative steps."

According to Agency officials, in the most recent fiscal year, just five law firms submitted nearly one-quarter of all PAGA notice filings. Almost one-fifth of all filings came from just five attorneys.

The coalition voiced support for the Agency's proposed regulations to label certain filers as "vexatious" when they repeatedly don't comply with legal notice requirements — a designation that would subject those filers to a screening before they file a PAGA case.

In addition, the coalition commended the Agency for crafting regulations to

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Cal/OSHA Corner

First-Aid Kit Rules Getting Refresh from Cal/OSHA Standards Board



Mel Davis
Workplace Safety
Expert

What is the Cal/OSHA Standards Board doing about first-aid kit requirements?

The latest proposal implementing changes to first-aid kit requirements in the Construction Safety Orders and the General Industry Safety Orders was presented at the monthly meeting of the Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board on January 15, 2026.

Among other requirements, the proposed revisions require that the location of first aid kits be indicated clearly

in the workplace and that employees have ready access. The proposal aims to clarify and modernize the rules, according to Cal/OSHA.

The proposed changes are in the California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 8, Section 1512, Emergency Medical Services, in the Construction Safety Orders, and in Section 3400, Medical Services and First Aid, in the General Industry Safety Orders.

The proposed revisions are drawn from existing data that has been available for many years — for instance, the requirements for Class A first-aid kits in American National Standards Institute (ANSI)/International Safety Equipment (ISEA) Z308.1-2021.

Separate Requirements

Cal/OSHA notes that the proposed rules will not apply where a CCR Title 8 vertical standard includes its own first-aid kit requirements, such as:

- Logging and Sawmill Safety Orders (Section 6251);
- Mine Safety Orders (Section 6969);
- Agriculture Operations (Section 3439).

Advisory Committee

The advisory committee convened to review the list of first-aid supplies required by Section 1512 noted that the existing list is outdated and that requiring employers to adjust the specific types and quantities of supplies based on the number of employees on a job makes compliance unnecessarily difficult.

The committee generally concurred with the recommendation to align the first-aid kit requirements in sections 1512 and 3400 with the ANSI/ISEA Z308.1 standard, which it said would improve both compliance and employee safety.

In conclusion the committee recommended that sections 1512 and 3400 include language about specialized first-aid

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CalChamber-Sponsored Seminars/Trade Shows

More information at www.calchamber.com.
Human Resources

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

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

Common Wage Violations 2026.

CalChamber. March 5, Free Member Webinar. [Contact account manager](#).

Navigating Paid Sick Leave & Time Off Requests in California. March 19, [Webinar](#). (800) 331-8877.

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

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

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

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

Supervisor Essentials. CalChamber, July

16, [Virtual Seminar](#). (800) 331-8877.

Conducting California Workplace Investigations. CalChamber. August 27, [Virtual Seminar](#). (800) 331-8877.

Simplifying Local Ordinances: Helpful Resources for California Employers. CalChamber. [Webinar recording](#). (800) 331-8877.

2026 Employment Law Updates. CalChamber. [Webinar recording](#). (800) 331-8877.

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CalChamber Calendar

Women's Leadership Forum & Reception:
March 3, Sacramento

Board of Directors:
March 12–13, Half Moon Bay

International Trade Breakfast:
March 13, Half Moon Bay

Next Alert: February 27

The Workplace

Wearable Technologies in the Workplace: What Employers Should Know



As wearable technology moves from wrists and pockets to glasses, jewelry and even clothing, California employers

are confronting a new set of workplace questions — often before they realize the technology is already in the building.

In [Episode 238](#) of *The Workplace* podcast, Matthew Roberts, CalChamber Associate General Counsel for Labor and Employment, welcomes CalChamber Employment Law Expert Sharon Novak for a timely conversation on wearable technology in the workplace.

What begins with a seemingly simple scenario — an employee shows up to work wearing prescription smart glasses

— quickly opens the door to complex issues around privacy, recording, disability accommodation and policy gaps many employers don't realize they have yet.

Drawing from real CalChamber Labor Law Helpline calls, Novak explains why wearable technology is catching employers off guard and how concerns from coworkers, managers and HR are surfacing in unexpected ways.

In the above scenario, an employee complained to HR that he felt his privacy rights were being invaded because of his coworker's smart glasses.

Novak explains how existing laws are being applied to emerging technology, where employers still have control, and where legal limits require extra care — particularly when it comes to recording in the workplace and employee rights under federal labor law.

Roberts and Novak also discuss how

employers need to be aware of wearable technologies and what they do. Employers need to develop clear, thoughtful policies to address new technology in a way that protects the employer and mitigates risk without interfering with employees' rights under state and federal laws. Importantly, make sure any policy doesn't outright prohibit the wearable technology.

Finally, employers should explain their policies to employees in advance — thoughtful communication and proactive planning matter as much as written policies.

Employers should listen to this podcast so they can start thinking about wearable tech strategies. As Novak makes clear, this technology isn't coming — it's already here, and employers who understand the risks and realities will be better positioned to respond.

Early Momentum for Initiative to Build Essential Projects Faster

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California Act cuts unnecessary delays so homes can be built faster and at lower cost—helping more families find housing they can afford,” said **Dan Dunmoyer, President & CEO, California Building Industry Association.**

“We are proud to support the Building an Affordable California Act — it cuts permitting red tape, delays, and bureaucracy so we can build the housing we need and lower rent and mortgage costs for Californians,” said **Corey Smith, Executive Director, Housing Action Coalition.**

“Water is essential in producing a healthy and affordable food supply. The Building an Affordable California Act helps improve access to water by reducing delays and costs of our vital water projects so our family farms can keep food more cost effective for California families and continue feeding the nation and the world,” said **Emily Rooney, President, Agricultural Council of California.**

Background

The Building an Affordable California Act modernizes California's proj-

ect approval and permitting process for essential projects — including housing, water infrastructure, clean energy, transportation infrastructure, hospitals and health care facilities, schools and educational facilities, broadband, and wildfire prevention and resilience projects — by establishing clear timelines, improving accountability, and reducing unnecessary delays, while preserving strong environmental, labor, and tribal cultural resource protections.

More information is available at [BuildAffordableCA.com](https://www.buildaffordableca.com).

First-Aid Kit Rules Getting Refresh from Cal/OSHA Standards Board

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supplies that might be needed to address unique hazards in the workplace; that is, hazards to which the minimum set of first-aid supplies required by the ANSI/ISEA Z308.1 standard might be inadequate.

New Terms/Updated Equipment

Please note that the proposed first-aid revisions to sections 1512 and 3400 are quite extensive and contain many new terms and references to updated equipment.

It is highly recommended that employers review carefully the proposal heard on January 15, 2026 as outlined in the Standards Board's [Informative Digest of Proposed Action/Policy Statement Overview](#).

More background and documents related to the history of the first-aid rulemaking are available on the [Standards Board's first-aid page](#).

Because of the prolonged process this rulemaking has undergone, there still

could be some additional revisions waiting to be brought to the surface before the final version is presented to the Office of Administrative Law for approval.

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.

President Signs Renewal of Trade Preference Program for African Nations



Last week, President Trump signed legislation that reauthorizes the African Growth and Opportunity

Act (AGOA) trade preference program through the end of the year. This was a part of the \$1.2 trillion spending package that also reopened the government after a brief partial shutdown.

The AGOA provides duty-free entry into the United States for almost all African products. Congress last renewed the program for 10 years in 2015. The short extension of the trade law is retroactive to September 30, 2025, the day it expired after the last renewal.

The trade preference program has been the model behind U.S.-African trade and investment since it was enacted in 2000.

Legislation [passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on January 12](#) renewed the AGOA for three years. Although U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer supported the three-year renewal, the White House came out of in favor of a one-year extension.

Building on Benefits

“AGOA for the 21st century must demand more from our trading partners and yield more market access for U.S. businesses, farmers, and ranchers to build upon the benefits it has historically provided to Africa and the United States,” [Ambassador Greer said](#) in a statement on February 3, the day Trump signed the AGOA reauthorization bill.

“We must also make sure that the program enhances U.S.-Africa trade and will work with Congress over the next year to modernize the program to align with President Trump’s America First

Trade Policy,” Greer added.

According to the statement, the U.S. Trade Representative will work with relevant agencies in the coming days to give effect to any modifications made to the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States as a result of the AGOA reauthorizing legislation.

The California Chamber of Commerce **urged renewal of the AGOA**, which affects 32 of the approximately 45 sub-Saharan nations. There are a total of 54 African nations. The AGOA has helped to expand and diversify African exports to the United States.

AGOA

The AGOA is the cornerstone of economic relations between the United States and sub-Saharan African nations. Since 2000, the program has fostered increased trade and investment within Africa while raising standards by promoting fair treatment for U.S. companies and farmers, human rights, anti-corruption efforts, and democracy.

U.S. businesses have invested \$8 billion annually under AGOA while African trading nations are opening their markets for U.S. agricultural products.

AGOA has the most stringent eligibility criteria of any preference program; countries must undergo annual reviews to ensure they meet strict standards related to the rule of law and political pluralism, anti-corruption, intellectual property rights, human rights and market access. The program ensures beneficiaries do not undermine U.S. national security or foreign policy interests.

Africa is home to approximately 30% of the world’s critical mineral resources. China has invested \$8 billion to \$10 billion in Africa to try to monopolize supply chains for these resources. AGOA

is one of the United States’ most valuable tools for securing its long-term economic and national security.

The AGOA embodies a trade and investment-centered approach to development. Enactment of the AGOA has stimulated the growth of the African private sector and provided incentives for further reform. By providing commercial incentives to encourage bilateral trade, the AGOA aims at transforming the relationship between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa away from aid dependence to enhanced commerce.

CalChamber Position

The CalChamber believes that it is in the mutual economic interest of the United States and sub-Saharan Africa to promote stable and sustainable economic growth and development in sub-Saharan Africa and that this growth depends in large measure upon the development of a receptive environment for trade and investment.

The CalChamber is supportive of the United States seeking to facilitate market-led economic growth in, and thereby the social and economic development of, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

In particular, the CalChamber is supportive of the United States seeking to assist sub-Saharan African countries, and the private sector in those countries, to achieve economic self-reliance.

Sub-Saharan Africa will have 25% of the world’s population by 2050. Economic self-reliance is critical for this growing population.

By providing new market opportunities, AGOA has helped bolster economic growth, promoted economic and political reform, and improved U.S. economic relations in the region.

Staff Contact: [Susanne T. Stirling](#)

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create a new system for submitting documents that discourages filers from copying and pasting boilerplate notices.

“While we are still reviewing the proposed regulations as a whole, these

are positive, important steps into ensuring PAGA works as it was intended,” the coalition statement concluded.

“The benefits to businesses, employees and ultimately, consumers will be far-reaching.”

Coalition members include the California Chamber of Commerce, the California New Car Dealers Association, the California Restaurant Association, the California Retailers Association, and the Western Growers Association.

Visitor Screening Proposal Could Hurt Tourism, CalChamber Warns



Sweeping changes to the screening requirements for visitors to the United States

from certain countries could have a chilling effect on travel and communities that rely on tourism spending, the California Chamber of Commerce pointed out in a letter last week to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The federal agency [has proposed](#) requiring for the first time that visitors from close partner countries that participate in the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) program provide social media data and other personally identifying information to the government.

Key Changes

Key changes proposed to the [Visa Waiver Program \(VWP\)](#) and [ESTA](#) include:

- a mandate to provide social media history (5 years);
- enhanced biometrics (live selfie, potential fingerprint/iris/DNA); and
- a move to a mobile-only application platform.

Although the new requirements aim to enhance vetting, combat terrorism, and identify fraud by utilizing social media to confirm identity or travel history, the travel industry fears the increased requirements and potential privacy concerns could discourage millions of visitors from utilizing the Visa Waiver Program. The VWP, which is intentionally different from a cumbersome visa process, has long balanced security,

economic growth, and strong international partnerships.

Confusion, Uncertainty

In its [February 5 letter](#), CalChamber noted that the proposed expansion of data collection requirements already has generated significant confusion and alarm among international travelers, foreign media, and Visa Waiver Program partner governments, and is creating uncertainty for international visitors.

CalChamber cited a survey of more than 4,500 international travelers from VWP countries by the World Travel & Tourism Council. A large share of those surveyed said the proposed policy would make the United States feel less welcoming and less attractive for both leisure and business travel.

More than a third of those surveyed revealed that they would be somewhat or much less likely to visit the U.S. due to the new proposal. The potential decline in travelers — a greater than 23% reduction from VWP countries — could cost the U.S. an estimated \$15.7 billion in lost visitor spending and more than 150,000 lost jobs.

“This would be devastating to not just the travel economy, but to states and communities across the country,” CalChamber said.

For international travelers — particularly business travelers — mandating that they provide extensive social media information, and highly sensitive personal data such as DNA, is deeply concerning. Faced with these requirements, many travelers may opt to conduct business and visit alternative markets rather than the U.S.

Countries in Program

The Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 (VWP) enables most citizens or nationals of 42 participating countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa.

Travelers must have valid ESTA approval before travel and meet all requirements.

Citizens or nationals of the following countries are eligible to travel to the United States under the VWP: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, and United Kingdom.

CalChamber / California

The CalChamber encourages increased travel to California by fostering investment in advertising and improvements to tourism infrastructure, considering the important role of tourism in the state's economy.

In 2024, visitor spending in California reached \$157.3 billion, supported 1.16 million jobs and generated \$12.6 billion in tax revenue for the state and local governments — with overall international airlift to California growing steadily in 2025.

Staff Contact: [Susanne T. Stirling](#)

CalChamber-Sponsored Seminars/Trade Shows

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International Trade

Agriculture Tech in South Africa, Export Training. Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) and Zurcom International. February 19–May 7, [Virtual](#).

5th Annual California International Arbitration Week. California Lawyers Association. March 9–12, San Francisco. [Event website](#).

California Ag Tech Mission. GO-Biz and North Valley Thrive. March 19, Merced. [Apply to participate](#).

Chile FIDAE Airshow: California Pavilion. GO-Biz. April 7–12, Santiago, Chile. [See flyer](#). Apply by February 20. Diana.Dominguez@gobiz.ca.gov. EXIM Annual Conference. Export-Import Bank of the United States. April 29–30, Washington, D.C. [Conference website](#).

The World in Motion: Advancing Sports Tourism on a Global Stage. Inland Empire World Trade Conference Committee and San Bernardino International Airport. May 1, Highland. [Get tickets](#).

SelectUSA Investment Summit. Select

USA. May 3–6, National Harbor, Maryland. [Event website](#).

NADEC Annual Trade Conference: Global Trade in Transition. National Association of District Export Councils. May 12–13, Nashville, Tennessee. [Event website](#).

BeautyWorld Saudi Arabia: California Pavilion. GO-Biz. May 18–20. [See flyer](#). Tricia.Utterback@gobiz.ca.gov.

Asia Tech x Singapore: California Pavilion. GO-Biz. May 20–22, Singapore. [Learn more](#).