

Summary of Recent Changes to Accessory Dwelling Unit Laws



In Government Code Section 65852.150, the California Legislature found and declared that, among other things, allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in zones that allow single-family and multifamily uses provides additional rental housing, and is an essential component in addressing California's housing needs. Over the years, ADU law has been revised to improve its effectiveness at creating more housing units. Changes to ADU laws effective January 1, 2020, further reduce barriers, better streamline approval processes, and expand capacity to accommodate the development of ADUs and junior accessory dwelling units (JADUs).

ADUs are a unique opportunity to address a variety of housing needs and provide affordable housing

options for family members, friends, students, the elderly, in-home health care providers, people with disabilities, and others. Further, ADUs offer an opportunity to maximize and integrate housing choices within existing neighborhoods.

Within this context, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has prepared this guidance to assist local governments, homeowners, architects, and the general public in encouraging the development of ADUs. Please see Attachment 1 for the complete statutory changes. The following is a summary of legislation since 2019 that amended ADU law and became effective as of January 1, 2020.

AB 68 (Ting), AB 881 (Bloom), and SB 13 (Wieckowski)

Chapter 653, Statutes of 2019 (Senate Bill 13, Section 3), Chapter 655, Statutes of 2019 (Assembly Bill 68, Section 2) and Chapter 659 (Assembly Bill 881, Section 1.5 and 2.5) build upon recent changes to ADU and JADU law (Government Code Sections 65852.2, 65852.22 and further address barriers to the development of ADUs and JADUs) (Attachment A includes the combined ADU statute updates from SB 13, AB 68 and AB 881.)

This recent legislation, among other changes, addresses the following:

- Prohibits local agencies from including in development standards for ADUs requirements on minimum lot size (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(1)(B)(i)).
- Clarifies areas designated by local agencies for ADUs may be based on the adequacy of water and sewer services as well as impacts on traffic flow and public safety (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(1)(A)).
- Eliminates all owner-occupancy requirements by local agencies for ADUs approved between January 1, 2020 and January 1, 2025 ((Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(6)).
- Prohibits a local agency from establishing a maximum size of an ADU of less than 850 square feet, or 1,000 square feet if the ADU contains more than one bedroom and requires approval of a permit to build an ADU of up to 800 square feet ((Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (c)(2)(B) & (C)).

- Clarifies that when ADUs are created through the conversion of a garage, carport or covered parking structure, replacement off-street parking spaces cannot be required by the local agency (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(1)(D)(xi)).
- Reduces the maximum ADU and JADU application review time from 120 days to 60 days (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(3) and (b)).
- Clarifies that “public transit” includes various means of transportation that charge set fees, run on fixed routes and are available to the public (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (j)(10)).
- Establishes impact fee exemptions and limitations based on the size of the ADU. ADUs up to 750 square feet are exempt from impact fees (Government Code Section 65852.2, Subdivision (f)(3)); ADUs that are 750 square feet or larger may be charged impact fees but only such fees that are proportional in size (by square foot) to those for the primary dwelling unit (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (f)(3)).
- Defines an “accessory structure” to mean a structure that is accessory or incidental to a dwelling on the same lot as the ADU (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (j)(2)).
- Authorizes HCD to notify the local agency if HCD finds that their ADU ordinance is not in compliance with state law (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (h)(2)).
- Clarifies that a local agency may identify an ADU or JADU as an adequate site to satisfy RHNA housing needs (Gov. Code § 65583.1, subd. (a), and § 65852.2, subd. (m)).
- Permits JADUs even where a local agency has not adopted an ordinance expressly authorizing them (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (a)(3), (b), and (e)).
- Allows a permitted JADU to be constructed within the walls of the proposed or existing single-family residence and eliminates the required inclusion of an existing bedroom or an interior entry into the single-family residence (Gov. Code § 65852.22, subd. (a)(4); Former Gov. Code § 65852.22, subd. (a)(5)).
- Requires, upon application and approval, a local agency to delay enforcement against a qualifying substandard ADU for five (5) years to allow the owner to correct the violation, so long as the violation is not a health and safety issue, as determined by the enforcement agency (Gov. Code, § 65852.2, subd. (n); Health and Safety Code § 17980.12).

AB 587 (Friedman), AB 670 (Friedman), and AB 671 (Friedman)

In addition to the legislation listed above, AB 587 (Chapter 657, Statutes of 2019), AB 670 (Chapter 178, Statutes of 2019), and AB 671 (Chapter 658, Statutes of 2019) also have an impact on state ADU law, particularly through Health and Safety Code Section 17980.12. These recent pieces of legislation, among other changes, address the following:

- AB 587 creates a narrow exemption to the prohibition for ADUs to be sold or otherwise conveyed separately from the primary dwelling by allowing deed-restricted sales to occur if the local agency adopts an ordinance. To qualify, the primary dwelling and the ADU are to be built by a qualified nonprofit corporation whose mission is to provide units to low-income households (Gov. Code § 65852.26).
- AB 670 provides that covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) that either effectively prohibit or unreasonably restrict the construction or use of an ADU or JADU on a lot zoned for single-family residential use are void and unenforceable (Civil Code Section 4751).

- AB 671 requires local agencies' housing elements to include a plan that incentivizes and promotes the creation of ADUs that can offer affordable rents for very low, low-, or moderate-income households and requires HCD to develop a list of state grants and financial incentives in connection with the planning, construction and operation of affordable ADUs. (Gov. Code § 65583; Health and Safety Code § 50504.5)