



AB 457 – Streamlining Approvals of Farmworker Housing in Fresno, Merced, and Madera Counties

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill (AB) 457 extends a ministerial approval process and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) exemption for affordable farmworker housing within 15 miles of farm or grazing land in the Counties of Santa Clara and Santa Cruz to also include the Counties of Fresno, Madera, and Merced.

BACKGROUND

While California's housing crisis is often thought of in terms of its effects on dense urban cities, the effects on more rural areas have been equally devastating and present unique challenges. An important step to address this issue was taken by AB 1783 (Rivas 2019), which created a streamlined, ministerial approval process for up to 36 units of farmworker housing in agricultural zones. The bill also put in place important safeguards by explicitly extending state tenant, fair housing, and labor protections to tenants of these developments.

While AB 1783 was vitally important in combatting the rural housing crisis, three factors have combined to hinder the widespread use of its provisions. First, providing the necessary infrastructure and connections to water, sewer, and other utilities is more expensive and difficult on agriculturally-zoned land. Second, the amenities residents need are frequently far from agricultural land, making building housing there less attractive to developers. Third, larger developments often have an easier time of securing grants and financing, so the limitation to a maximum of 36 units can make these developments financially unfeasible.

To address these challenges, AB 3035 (Pellerin 2024) created a targeted reform in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties which expanded the ministerial approval process to include up to 150 units of farmworker housing within 15 miles of farm or grazing land.

THIS BILL

To ensure the farmworkers of the Central Valley's agricultural heartland have the affordable and dignified housing they deserve, we must streamline the process for approving new developments on the most fitting sites. AB 457 will allow the ministerial approval of up to 150 units of affordable farmworker housing within 15 miles of farm or grazing land in the Counties of Fresno, Madera, and Merced, in addition to the Counties of Santa Clara and Santa Cruz that it currently applies to.

By applying ministerial approval for developments up to 15 miles away from farm or grazing land in these counties, AB 457 promotes affordable farmworker housing near urban amenities and community services while facilitating easy connections to utilities. At the same time, increasing the maximum allowable development size to 150 units enables better access to financing while also ensuring the scale of the development fits the scale of the need. AB 457 is a narrow, targeted fix that facilitates the much needed development of affordable housing for the Central Valley's crucial farmworker communities.

CONTACT

Ben Endsley, Legislative Aide
(916) 319-2027
ben.endsley@asm.ca.gov