



Legislative Interview Kit 2023-2024

****[Legislative Interview Reports](#) Due February 26, 2024****



Introduction

Every year, the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) encourages local League members to interview their state legislators or staff. Legislative interviews are a powerful tool - increasing League visibility, gathering information, and raising awareness among California's state representatives about our interest in policies they are considering.

Legislative interviews are an opportunity for legislators to share their priorities with local Leagues and develop an understanding of League positions and priorities. Local Leagues discover plans for state legislation that may impact their communities. Furthermore, the state League learns more about legislators and the interests of local Leagues, gaining information useful in planning statewide advocacy and education.

Use interviews to become better acquainted with your legislators and their staff. It's a chance to emphasize that while the League never supports or opposes candidates or parties, we are a political organization, and after thorough study and consensus we take positions on issues.

While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, many will opt for online meetings. Although this isn't the same as face-to-face interviews, our hope is that using an online platform will give you more flexibility and make the process easier for all involved, including by simplifying scheduling, note taking, and sharing of resources.

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Making Democracy Work: An Equity Lens

The League of Women Voters of California applies an “equity lens” by analyzing what we do from the perspective of how it impacts underrepresented individuals and communities. Legislative interviews offer an excellent opportunity to develop representative League leadership and add rich, diverse perspectives to your work.

In that spirit, we encourage you to front end diversity, equity and inclusion in legislative interviews by proactively reaching out and including League members and potential members who are young, Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, have disabilities, are in the LGBTQI+ community, or otherwise underrepresented.

Legislative Interview Questions (short versions)

The following are short versions of the questions to be posed to your legislator. The full versions of the questions and background information for Questions 1 through 3 may be found starting on [page 9](#).

Question 1: What can we learn about open meetings from the pandemic?

During the recent pandemic, California's open meeting laws were modified to comply with public health regulations in order to protect the health of the public as well as that of our public officials. This “shut down” period had unexpected side benefits: electronic access to meetings enhanced accessibility for both the public and officials, and also increased public participation. At the same time, the move to online meetings reduced transparency and accountability by allowing public officials to avoid being present at a physical location where the public can directly engage.

- What changes would you like to see to our public meeting laws, and, more importantly, what process should California use to review these laws to ensure that we have a thoughtful and coordinated set of reforms that reflect both the interests of the public and of government agencies?
- How do we maintain increased accessibility and public participation in meetings without significantly diminishing transparency and accountability?

Question 2: What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

To reduce the effects of climate change, we need to move away from fossil fuels. Although urgent, doing so will take time. Meanwhile, the health impacts of climate change are being felt today and will only continue to worsen. The [Center for Disease Control](#) reports that the health effects related to climate change include increased respiratory and

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cardiovascular disease, injury and death due to extreme weather events including prolonged heat events, food insecurity, mental illness, and an increase in vector-borne illnesses and other infectious diseases. California is already experiencing the adverse health effects of climate-change related to air pollution and prolonged and extreme heat events. What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

Question 3: Housing underproduction has been identified as one of the most significant problems facing California today. According to one [estimate by McKinsey Global Institute](#), we need to build 3.5 million housing units by 2025 to end the shortage. How do we make substantial progress to increase housing and decrease homelessness?

A key to solving the problem of homelessness is to increase the number of housing units available throughout the state - from urban/cities to rural/small towns to coastal/vacation locations. Each community has a different approach to zoning, to accessible government response to builders and the broader approach to community needs regarding air, water, transportation and access to schools and greenspace. Several options have been proposed to address the dilemma. What approach would you support to help resolve the problem? Which would you lead with as a starting point?

- Roll back property zoning or land-use regulation.
- Financial bond measures for local communities.
- Increased reduction of CEQA by the Legislature.
- State funded fees for builders of low- and moderate-income housing.
- State funded grants to communities for reducing the time delay granting building permits.
- Other ideas?

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator

What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2024? What are your personal priorities? Please make sure to ask this question. It provides us with very valuable insight into your legislator.

Question 5: Local Issues

Local League Question(s) related to issues of particular local concern. This is entirely optional, but you are welcome to include a question related to local issues.

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The Legislative Interview Process

Advance work by League interview team members is essential to success. This is a short-term project that includes preparation, the interview, and wrap-up. It's advisable to hold a few organizing meetings for your team, especially if it includes people who are new to the process.

1. **Schedule the interview.** This can take time so start early!

- While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, it's fine to conduct these interviews through Zoom or some other online platform.
- If a legislative district encompasses **multiple League districts**, please coordinate your visit among the relevant local Leagues. The [Local League Legislative Directory](#) lists all of the local Leagues in each district. If you wish to schedule separate interviews because you have different issues to discuss with a particular legislator, feel free to do so.

It is critical that you keep all other Leagues in the district informed if you choose to schedule a separate interview.

- While it is important to try to get an appointment with the legislator, it may be difficult to schedule. Cultivating a relationship with the district director or other staff involved in the legislation (as opposed to constituent services) can also be very valuable. If a meeting with the legislator is not possible then ask to meet with staff who have a substantive role in legislation.

2. **Assemble your interview team.** Teams of three to five members are ideal.

- Coordinators should try to include at least one person with a long-term League background, someone with a history of working with the legislator, someone well versed in the relevant issues, new and young members, and people from underrepresented groups to develop representative League leadership and add diverse perspectives.
- Check [the FAQs](#) for recommended meeting roles and responsibilities.

3. **Prepare the team.** Hold advance meetings to go over interview roles and the questions and topics to be covered.

4. **Prepare materials.** There are a number of substantive materials we offer associated with each question and [general resources](#) provided for your team's use. You can also develop a set of materials to [send to the legislator's office](#) either ahead of time or afterward.

5. **The interview.** Read over [interview etiquette tips](#) and the [FAQs](#) for detailed recommendations.

6. **Wrap-up and report back**

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- Review reports to be sent to the LWVC and presented to your membership. This should happen as soon as possible after the interview.
- Please fill out the online [Legislative Interview Report Form](#) by **February 26, 2024**. This makes it easier for us to compile and analyze your responses effectively. Please let us know if you need help using the online report form by emailing Adrianna Champagne-Zamora at achampagne@lwvc.org.

Interview Etiquette Tips

- ★ Be prepared. Study the background materials and the substance of the topics covered in the interview questions.
- ★ Follow your assigned role on the interview team and make space for underrepresented voices among your teammates.
- ★ Opinions expressed should be only those of the League, not of individuals.
- ★ Do not overstay your welcome - stick to the time allotted for the meeting.
- ★ **Secure the legislator's permission and specific conditions under which you may print any part of the interview in a VOTER or other newsletter. If you plan on recording the meeting, make sure you get the legislator's permission to do so.**

FAQS for the Legislative Interview Process

Should we send the questions we plan to ask beforehand?

Our recommendation is **not to share the actual interview questions with your legislator in advance**. We believe there's a clear benefit in legislators' unrehearsed responses. The purposes of an in-person interview are to look the representative or their staff in the eye, hear their tone of voice, and get a sense of their interest in an issue. In addition, this gives the legislator an opportunity to interact with our local League members and develop or further an ongoing relationship. A preformed statement of positions that could simply be mailed to us fails to accomplish these goals.

Please feel free to share the issue areas (changes to open meeting laws, mitigating the health impacts of climate change, and the problem of housing underproduction) with the representative in advance so that they may broadly prepare themselves for your questions. Tell them that the specific questions asked by your interview committee will come from those issue areas.

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How do we divide up roles?

Here are some ideas about roles and responsibilities derived from prior experience.

Team Leader

- **Make the appointment.** Contact the legislator's local district office. Be persistent. **Ask for an hour but accept less if necessary.** If you cannot get a meeting with the legislator, ask to meet with the district director. They are often extremely well versed about everything going on in a district and in the legislature. At the very least, make sure that your visit is scheduled with someone involved in legislation and not solely in constituent services. Your visit will still be noted and remembered.
- **Confirm.** Send the legislator and staff a message confirming the appointment, mentioning the topics you will discuss. (**Do not send a copy of the “Questions,” “Background,” or the “Legislative Interview Report Form” sections of this kit.**)
- **Set up a team prep meeting.** Brief the members of the team on interview etiquette, determine the role each member will take, and discuss each participant's responsibilities as an interview team member. If your team includes members of historically underrepresented communities, please ensure that other members step back to provide an opportunity for that voice and perspective to be heard.
- **Make introductions.** Lead the introductions at the start of the interview and invite League members to introduce themselves.
- **Watch the clock.** Pace the interview and tactfully keep everyone (including the legislator) on the subject. You will know in advance how much time the legislator has agreed to spend with you and allot an appropriate amount of time to each question.
- **Send a thank you.** Write a follow-up thank you after the interview. A thank you note gives you an opportunity to underscore points made at the interview, answer any questions you were not sure about, or send a League publication you may have referred to during the course of the interview.

Researcher

- **Background.** Brief the other members of the interview team on the legislator's relationship with the League and his/her voting record. What are his/her committee assignments and/or leadership positions in the legislature?
- **Check legislator's League membership.** Is the legislator a member of your League or another League in the district? If they aren't a member, then the interview team should ask the legislator to join the League.
- **Check bill history.** Check the [LWVC Bill Status Reports](#) for the past few cycles for information about bills your legislator authored and the League either supported or opposed. You can dig even deeper by checking the legislator's history using [California's legislative information site](#). You may want to take a moment to express the League's appreciation or disappointment about a particular bill on which the state League took a position, and briefly state the League's position.

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- **Keep a digital research file.** The information you develop should become part of an ongoing file about each legislator.

Background Briefer

- **Team briefing.** Inform team members as to League positions and history on the interview question topics.
- **Team discussion.** Lead a discussion with team members about the background information on question topics and the substance of the interview questions.
- **Legislator briefing.** If your legislator is new or does not know the League well, plan to spend some time talking about the mission of the League and briefly explain the difference between the League's advocacy and education roles. Describe how we [take positions](#) on issues.

Recorder

- **Document.**
 - ✓ Have the interview questions in front of you.
 - ✓ Make note of bills or policy objectives mentioned by the legislator.
 - ✓ Make note of requests for information or League materials from the legislator.
 - ✓ Write up the material from your notes promptly.
- **Debrief.** Conduct a debriefing with team members shortly after the interview.
- **Report.** Complete the [online report form](#) by **February 26, 2024**. Responses received by this date will be the most useful for action on League priorities.

What materials should I provide?

Before or after your interview we recommend sending an email attaching or linking to materials.

- **Membership information** from each local League represented. Ask the legislator and staff members present to join!
- **League publications.** Send links to publications that are appropriate and relevant. You can send the League's [Action Positions and Policies](#) as a way to help elucidate the areas in which we work. And you might include publications like a local Facts for Voters and copies of local League newsletters.

Are there resources to help our team prepare?

You'll find resources related to the substance of the questions linked to throughout the "Background" sections associated with each question and sometimes a few more listed at the end. Here are some general resources.

[District maps](#) from the California Citizens Redistricting Commission

Find your [State Legislators](#)

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Local League Legislative Directory. Please let us know if you find any problems with this cross-referenced list of districts and local Leagues.

League Leader Contacts. Please contact [Adrianna Champagne-Zamora](#) <achampagne@lwvc.org> if you need the password.

LWVC Bill Status Reports. Information about bills on which the LWVC has taken a position and recommends action.

LWVC Advocacy Wrap-Up 2023 . Highlights of our year in advocacy.

LWVC Advocacy Resource Directory. A comprehensive set of resources organized by issue area and type of organization with a short description of the nature of each resource.

LegInfo. California's comprehensive online site for legislation and law. Scroll down the homepage to click through to "other resources" for more useful information.

California Legislative Analyst's Office. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has provided fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature for over 75 years. It is known for its fiscal and programmatic expertise and nonpartisan analyses of the state budget. In addition, the office estimates the fiscal effect on the state and local government of all proposed initiatives (prior to circulation) and prepares analyses of all measures that qualify for the statewide ballot.

Legislative Scorecards. While other organizations' scorecards may not align with League positions and priorities, they do offer good insight and substantive information about legislators and their voting history. Some are [collated by Ballotpedia](#). Here are links to a few we recommend checking.

- ★ [Courage Campaign](#)
- ★ [ACLU](#)
- ★ [Initiate Justice Action](#)
- ★ [Sierra Club California](#)
- ★ [California Chamber of Commerce](#)
- ★ [Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association](#)

Who do I contact with questions?

If you have any questions about the interviews, please contact LWVC Vice President for Advocacy and Program, Gloria Chun Hoo at ghoo@lwvc.org or LWVC Public Policy and Organizing Manager, Adrianna Champagne-Zamora at achampagne@lwvc.org.

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Legislative Interview Questions

Question 1: What Can We Learn About Open Meetings From the Pandemic?

During the recent pandemic, California's open meeting laws were modified to comply with public health regulations in order to protect the health of the public as well as that of our public officials. This "shut down" period had unexpected side benefits: electronic access to meetings enhanced accessibility for both the public and officials, and increased public participation. At the same time, the move to online meetings reduced transparency and accountability by allowing public officials to avoid being present at a physical location where the public can directly engage.

- What changes would you like to see to our public meeting laws, and, more importantly, what process should California use to review these laws to ensure that we have a thoughtful and coordinated set of reforms that reflect both the interests of the public and of government agencies?
- How do we maintain increased accessibility and public participation in meetings without significantly diminishing transparency and accountability?

If the Legislator Needs Some Hints or Prompts:

The legislature has been working on and wrestling with these questions as emergency restrictions ease or are phased out. Specifically, we would like to know legislators' views on these conundrums.

- 1) Having a quorum in person in the same room is the very definition of a "meeting" in Brown and Bagley Keene. What are your views on this definition and on what it means to the functioning and transparency of meetings and their functioning over time?
- 2) We have had several bills attempting to define exceptions to the in-person rules to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). How do you think our regulations should be defined and how should these exceptions be granted to individuals and in what time frames?
- 3) Are there any changes to Brown or Bagley Keene that are particularly important to you?
- 4) We have seen a series of bills dealing with specific issues in either the Brown or Bagley Keene Acts, sometimes both. Would you support an alternative process that would start with a comprehensive look by legislators at Open Meeting rules in California, and how they could be updated in light of what was learned during the pandemic?

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Background on Question 1

On March 12, 2020, Californians felt the blow of stay-at-home orders – Governor Newsom’s [Executive Order N-25-20](#) of that day. Among other matters, he set aside many of the **guidelines for transparency in public meetings** during the pandemic.¹ Public meetings in California are primarily regulated by the Bagley Keene Act, for state boards and commissions, and the Brown Act, covering local governmental bodies. Both state in their preambles that the government organizations they cover:

...exist to aid in the conduct of the people’s business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

Having to make an instantaneous change from meetings in person to meeting online or telephonically was a formidable change and challenge. Legislative bodies were challenged to immediately have advanced technological means to communicate, both among themselves and with the public in real time. The formidable change for the public was perhaps more positive – realizing that they could phone or “Zoom” in meant they could hear and see meetings from anywhere in the jurisdiction of that legislative body and beyond.

The drawback was that the public and the press were not in the same place as the public officials. It wasn’t possible to look them in the eye when making a public statement. The officials could turn their cameras off – or simply participate by phone – limiting the ability to see their reaction. It was much more difficult to show a community’s position on an issue by having a large number of people appear at a meeting. And journalists were unable to approach officials, see how decision-makers engage with the public, and observe how officials interact with one another on the dais - impeding their ability to keep Californians informed.

Now, as we start to return to a more normal situation, the question for us, and our legislators, is how to revise our basic laws in a post-pandemic world. We see some things we like – like more participation from the public, more ability to be on a committee or commission if we are unable to participate in person, and importantly - increased access for people with disabilities. We also see some places to wrestle with. The original teleconferencing rules specify that every remote location a member teleconferences from

¹ This [Know Your Rights - California Public Meetings](#) webinar, produced jointly by the LWVC and the First Amendment Coalition, provides a good general background on the laws related to California public meetings and some of the changes that occurred during the pandemic. The Attorney General’s [Guide to the Bagley-Keene Act](#) and the League of California Cities’ [Guide to the Brown Act](#) are also helpful resources.

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must be open to the public. Does this discourage diversity in the legislative body if it requires a person with disabilities to invite the public into a private home? Transparency through remote access is imperfect, and is especially impeded when committee members turn off their cameras or dial in. How would we decide who in the government organization could be at a remote location if we still need to have at least a quorum in person?

Teleconferencing Laws Prior to the Executive Order

For both the Bagley-Keene and Brown Acts, with certain exceptions, all meetings of a government body are required to be open and public, and all persons are permitted to attend any meeting of that body. They authorize meetings through teleconference subject to certain requirements, including that the state body post agendas at all teleconference locations, that each teleconference location be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, that each teleconference location be accessible to the public, that the agenda provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the state body directly at each teleconference location, that at least a quorum are required to participate from within the geographic boundaries of the jurisdiction, and that at least one member of the government body be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting. Roll call voting is required for teleconference meetings.

How the First Executive Order Changed Existing Law

The first [Executive Order](#)² authorized state and local bodies to hold public meetings through teleconferencing, and make them publicly accessible either telephonically or electronically, but suspended requirements in both the Bagley-Keene Act and the Brown Acts that required the physical presence of members of the governing body and members of the commenting public. So long as advance notice was provided, agendas were posted, and alternative means for observation and comment were explained, and there was at least one ADA-compliant publicly accessible location from which members of the public could observe and offer public comment, the Order suspended the following rules:

1. Requirement to publicly release the teleconference location from which each member participates.
2. Requirement to make each teleconference location publicly accessible for observation and/or comment.
3. Requirement to post an agenda at each location.
4. Requirement for at least one member of the state body to be physically present at the teleconference location.
5. Requirement for a quorum of the legislative body to participate in meetings from teleconference locations within the agency's jurisdiction.

² See [Number 11](#).

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Responses to the Executive Orders

LWVC quickly gave guidance to local Leagues: “League principles, state law, and the California Supreme Court support the need for governmental transparency.” It urged us to monitor our local governmental organizations and report to the LWVC any lack of transparency we see. “Public access to meetings and to information about government business is just as crucial in times of crisis as in any other time.... Governments should not be allowed to take advantage of the opportunity that this crisis provides to make major decisions without public input if these decisions can reasonably be postponed.” (April 7, 2020)

Complaints from the public surfaced statewide: local bodies, particularly small committees and communities, were not prepared technologically or financially to fully comply, and there were other bodies that seemed to take advantage of the confusion and constraints. In a later [Executive Order N-29-20](#) the Governor also stated that the public may “observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically” and all governmental organizations “are urged to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to the provisions of the Bagley-Keene Act and the Brown Act... in order to maximize transparency and provide the public access to their meetings”. The Governor continued the restrictions through further Executive Orders, which extended deadlines through the end of September, 2021, then March, 2022.

Meanwhile, post-pandemic changes to open meetings began to be explored.

- CalMatters published two guest commentaries calling for reforms to the Brown Act.³ The pieces suggested that:
 - All local governmental organizations should be required to have ADA-compliant websites and post agendas, meeting materials, and minutes.
 - Standards for virtual public comment should be established.
 - Office holders should count toward a quorum no matter where in the world they might teleconference from.
 - Members should not be required to permit public access to their location.
 - A clear legal basis and transparent procedures are needed to authorize remote meetings during emergencies, establish equal opportunities for remote and in-person and remote real-time public comments, and require online notice, agenda, and meeting materials posting.
- The Little Hoover Commission studied teleconferencing in state bodies and produced a report [The Government of Tomorrow: Online Meetings](#) recommending

³ [Reform the Brown Act to enhance transparency and public access](#), Shawn Landres, 11/4/2020; [Here are priorities to reform the Brown Act for government transparency](#), Shawn Landres, 4/27/2021.

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changes to the Bagley Keene Act (see [website](#) for more information). Backed by the findings in a survey, their recommendations were to revise Bagley Keene in two major ways:

- The legislature should “take the meeting to the public, not the other way around.” Providing the public with both physical location and a teleconferencing option is not difficult to organize or too costly. Roll call votes should continue and provisions should be made for technological failures.
- Barriers to remote participation should be removed. Remote participation of board and commission members should not require public disclosure and accessibility to those locations. The Commission does not believe that physical presence in a room is critical to public access – it is critical that the public can know precisely what is said and done. They recommended that all board and commission members be allowed to participate remotely.
- Opposition to some of the Hoover Commission recommendations started to come from the ACLU, the First Amendment Coalition, and the California News Publishers Association. This coalition felt that remote access for the public is important, in particular access with video technology. However, they registered concerns that the Hoover Commission recommendations would make it easier for government officials to do business remotely from private locations like homes, and this erodes transparency and accountability. They expressed that the Hoover Commission did not give due consideration to preserving the public’s right to attend hearings, address members directly, and have meaningful communication with decision makers. They noted that there is enormous value in being able to see who is in the room and their interactions, and to interact in person with members - that nuance gets lost online. Journalists were concerned that they would lose an important opportunity to buttonhole members and report to the public.⁴
- Post-Executive Order Legislation
 - [AB 361](#) (R. Rivas 2021) extended and waived the requirements as in the Executive Orders, which were then again extended by a [third Executive Order](#) until January 2022.
 - [SB 189](#) (Senate Committee on the Budget 2022) extended the Bagley-Keene Act’s waiver to hold state body meetings entirely by remote teleconferencing, with no members required in person, until July 2023.
 - [SB 1100](#) (Cortese 2022) codified Brown Act procedures to use for removal of people due to disorderly conduct and disruption of local meetings.

⁴ Many of their concerns are reflected in [opposition to subsequent legislation](#). See also [California boards want to keep pandemic rules for public meetings. Critics call it bad for democracy](#), Sameea Kamal 9/22/23.

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- [AB 2449](#) (Rubio 2022) revised the Brown Act to authorize the use of teleconferencing for local bodies until 1/1/26, without requiring that each teleconferencing location be identified or open to the public if at least a quorum participates from a physical location open to the public. Members could participate remotely due to emergency or for defined “just causes” including childcare, caregiving, a member’s contagious illness, physical or mental disability, travel on official business of a state or local agency, or physical or family medical emergency. See [First Amendment Coalition](#) summary.

The Situation This Year

The 2023-2024 legislative session has brought a plethora of bills attempting to define various carve-outs from the return to Brown and Bagley-Keene original stipulations.⁵ Three bills made it through the legislature and were signed by Governor Newsom.

- [AB 557 \(Hart\)](#) reaffirmed all requirements for teleconferences for local bodies in emergencies in the Brown Act, but allows for the extension of state of emergency teleconferencing provisions indefinitely if the legislative body determines that, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees. The legislative body must also make these findings regarding the state of emergency provisions not later than 45 days after the first teleconferenced meeting (rather than 30 days in the emergency provisions) and every 45 days thereafter.
- [SB 411 \(Portantino\)](#) applies solely to the advisory Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles. While requiring adherence to most provisions of the Brown Act, it allows these councils to conduct their business via teleconference, while providing publicly accessible internet-based or call-in options, up until January 2026. “Reasonable efforts” must be made to provide an alternative physical location for public participation. The city council must adopt an authorizing resolution and two-thirds of an eligible legislative body must vote to use the alternate teleconferencing

⁵ Four bills were proposed but not pursued this year. One of them (AB 1275) was renamed and reassigned through a gut and amend process. While the other three could return in January, 2024, as two-year bills, it’s unlikely that they will. [AB 817](#) (Pacheco) would have allowed advisory bodies subject to the Brown Act to use teleconferencing procedures similar to the emergency provisions in the executive orders indefinitely, subject only to a yearly vote of the local body responsible for it. The bill died in the first policy committee.; [AB 1379](#) (Papan) would have made [AB 2449](#) permanent and removed several of the provisions limiting use. It was pulled by the author prior to the first hearing.; AB 1275 (Arambula) promulgated special rules for student-run community college organizations. A hearing was canceled in early July and it has now been gutted and amended to encompass a different topic. [SB 537](#) (Becker) applied to appointed bodies of multijurisdictional local agencies and would have allowed a broad range of public bodies to conduct public business from private locations – not identified, or accessible to the public, without having to show a special need or justification. The LWVC [opposed the bill](#) unless it was amended and ultimately [joined the coalition opposing](#) the bill on the floor. SB 537 was ordered to the inactive file by its author on the last day of the legislative session.

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provisions. At least a quorum must participate from within the bounds of their jurisdiction, and once a year at least a quorum must meet in the same physical location open to the public.

- [SB 544 \(Laird\)](#) revises the Bagley-Keene Act and applies to state bodies and sunsets in January 2026. A majority must be in a physical location, and those attending remotely must notify presenting a valid reason every time, identify anyone 18+ in the room, and the body must approve the exception. However there is a separate rule for advisory bodies that does not require a majority being present in a physical location. They must have a means for members of the public to remotely hear audio of and observe a meeting, or attend a meeting via a teleconference telephone number, internet website or online platform. There must also be a physical address for at least one site with access to the state body. A board member or staff must be physically present there. There must be the ability for the public to address the state body no matter how they have accessed the meeting, without having submitted their comments ahead of time. The body must implement a procedure for handling requests for accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the ADA. If disrupted from broadcasting no further action should take place until restored. State body members participating remotely must disclose if individuals 18+ are in the room and their relationship to them. The LWVC initially opposed [SB 544 unless amended](#) and then, despite some amendments that were taken, joined a coalition [requesting the Governor's veto](#). Our reasoning can be found in those linked letters.

The disparate solutions posed by legislators are reflected in this wide variety of bills. In its letters, the LWVC strongly urged the legislature to stop making one-off changes, and instead hold a legislative hearing to explore the options more comprehensively. We wrote:

The League of Women Voters of California strongly believes that changing open government regulations, when not in an emergency, deserves the focused evaluation afforded by legislative hearings, rather than a piecemeal adoption of situation-specific language. We believe that a comprehensive look into the matter, guided by an explicit mandate to support citizen participation and preserve the focus on transparency and access reflected in both the Bagley-Keene and the Brown Acts, will result in a thoughtful solution that recognizes advantages discovered during the pandemic and benefits both the public interest and that of state and local bodies.

We would like the legislators' views on our recommendation for a legislative hearing and to find out what changes they would like to see to our public meeting laws.

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Question 2: What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

To reduce the effects of climate change, we need to move away from fossil fuels. Although urgent, doing so will take time. Meanwhile, the health impacts of climate change are being felt today and will only continue to worsen. The [Center for Disease Control](#) reports that the health effects related to climate change include increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injury and death due to extreme weather events including prolonged heat events, food insecurity, mental illness, and an increase in vector-borne illnesses and other infectious diseases. California is already experiencing the adverse health effects of climate-change related to air pollution and prolonged and extreme heat events. What kinds of legislation would you bring or support to mitigate health effects of climate change, particularly air pollution and extreme heat?

Background on Question 2

Climate change affects nearly everything. Addressing climate change requires considering many cross-cutting and mutually dependent issues: it is a public health emergency, it affects our economy, it is interconnected with transportation issues, agriculture, water, weather, biodiversity, and so on. See [Health Risks Linked to Climate Change Are Getting Worse, Experts Warn](#). Some important health issues reflecting the current climate health emergency are as follows:

EXTREME WEATHER - Hurricanes, flooding, wildfire, heat

- Displaced populations, migrations
- Loss of homes, loss of security
- Water crises, water scarcity, water-borne illness
- Mental health - depression, grief, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, violence

FLOODING AND SEA LEVEL RISE

- Saltwater intrusion, loss of fresh well water
- Water contamination - sewage toxic leakage, algal blooms
- Mold - asthma, heart disease, strokes
- Insect-borne diseases - West Nile Virus, Dengue, Malaria

EXTREME HEAT - Longer and hotter heat waves

- Heat related death - especially disadvantaged people
- Increased crime
- Mental health
- Pregnancy and childbirth risk
- Increased ozone - worsened asthma

DROUGHT

- Dust storms - respiratory problems

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- Crop failures, food and economic crises
- Water crises, water scarcity
- Air quality - increased pollen, dust, allergies, asthma
- Wildfires - smoke, toxins

A case in point is the rise of a flesh-eating virus in the American West. In [An Invisible Killer](#), the Washington Post reports:

A key reason for Valley fever's spread, researchers say, may be [human-driven climate change](#) — and they warn that a much larger area of the United States will become vulnerable to the disease in the decades to come. The fungus thrives in dry soils, rides on plumes of dust and booms after periods of [extreme drought](#) — the exact cycles that scientists say have grown more intense and widespread across the American West due to the warming climate.

For more information on health effects of climate change see the [Health and Climate webpage](#), part of the LWV Climate Interest Group. See also our LWV blog, [Climate Change is a Public Health Crisis](#).

Heat and air pollution are two key health issues related to climate change that are particularly important in California. Both heat and particulates disproportionately impact our most marginalized communities, including those least able to afford air conditioning or housing in green spaces and those living close to freeways, industry, and in areas characterized by concrete, not trees.

Heat and Health Effects

With climate change, extreme heat events are on the rise. More areas will likely be affected by extreme heat more often, more severely, and for longer periods of time. [Sustained heat compromises the body's ability to regulate temperature](#) and can result in a cascade of illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and hyperthermia. Even small differences from seasonal average temperatures [are associated with increased illness and death](#).

An [urban heat island](#) is defined as an area subject to higher temperatures primarily due to less green space. Structures such as buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun's heat more than natural landscapes such as forests and water bodies.

Daytime temperatures in urban areas can be about [1-7°F higher than temperatures in outlying areas and nighttime temperatures are about 2-5°F higher](#). Tree cover is primarily associated with middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, while lower income neighborhoods typically have less tree cover, more traffic, and more industry.

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Methods to mitigate the effects of heat islands include accessible central cooling centers to address emergency situations, shade structures where people congregate such as bus stops, more trees and water features.

Air Pollution and Health Effects

[Air Pollution](#) has significant health effects. [Particulate exposure is linked](#) to asthma and other lung issues, as well as elevated [blood pressure, atherosclerosis, strokes](#) and [dementia](#).

The most prevalent particulates take many forms including wildfire smoke, vehicle exhaust, and particles caused by tire wear and micro plastics

Wildfires are made worse by climate change. Smoke particulates contain carcinogenic polyaromatic hydrocarbons. Although smoke is a danger, the massive climate-related fires in the northwest and California have also destroyed homes and farmlands resulting in climate refugees. Many of these fire-damaged communities take many years to be restored and rebuilt enough for rehabilitation. [A range of mental health effects, both short and long-term](#), often plague fire-impacted communities. While fires make the headlines, the years of stress and dislocation for communities can be invisible to the general population.

Vehicle tire wear is the principal source of microplastics in our [coastal waterways](#). The plastic from tire wear itself is harmful, but brake and tire particles also distribute copper, zinc and other heavy metals. Indeed, plastics seem to be everywhere. Tiny particles from plastics have even been found in the [feces of newborn babies](#). The [Great Pacific Garbage Patch](#) is now three times the size of France.

A year ago, LWVC supported [SB 54](#), a landmark bill to reduce the number of single use plastics and to increase producer responsibility for them. SB 54 is now in the process of being implemented.

Different parts of the state suffer from different sources of particulates and in different proportions: wildfire, diesel exhaust, industrial plants, agriculture, dry lake beds, vehicle dust. Exposure is also different because, while vehicle dust is a problem in all parts of the state where people drive, rainfall in the northern parts of the state washes it out of the air more frequently than in the arid south. The incredible diversity that is California makes state level requirements and legislation particularly difficult. Recognition of the need for flexibility in legislation is important.

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Question 3: Housing underproduction has been identified as one of the most significant problems facing California today. According to one [estimate by McKinsey Global Institute](#), we need to build 3.5 million housing units by 2025 to end the shortage. How do we make substantial progress to increase housing and decrease homelessness?

A key to solving the problem of homelessness is to increase the number of housing units available throughout the state - from urban/cities to rural/small towns to coastal/vacation locations. Each community has a different approach to zoning, to accessible government response to builders and the broader approach to community needs regarding air, water, transportation and access to schools and greenspace. Several options have been proposed to address the dilemma. What approach would you support to help resolve the problem? Which would you lead with as a starting point?

- Roll back property zoning or land-use regulation.
- Financial bond measures for local communities.
- Increased reduction of CEQA by the Legislature.
- State funded fees for builders of low- and moderate-income housing.
- State funded grants to communities for reducing the time delay granting building permits.
- Other ideas?

Background on Question 3

Introduction

What's the fastest way to gather a neighborhood for a community meeting? Just tell them that new multi-family housing is being built close by!

California has spent billions of dollars trying to resolve housing deficits and prevent increases in the homeless population, yet both remain primary concerns for most Californians. Homes end homelessness, but they aren't being built fast enough. And even though California houses thousands of homeless individuals every year, even more fall into homelessness, erasing the gains we had hoped for.

The state legislature, regional authorities, and some local governments are proposing access to cash through selling bonds in order to fund increased construction. Other solutions call for changes in local control on zoning and environmental concerns which developers say increase the cost and timing of building.

In the meantime, we are losing many young workers to other states that offer more affordable housing and shorter commute times. Workers at every income level need to be able to live in the community where they provide essential services. Priced out of housing, they can't afford the gas (or the car) to access their jobs and our public transit system is

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insufficient to provide a solution. The situation is profoundly destabilizing to the economy.⁶

Homelessness Trends in California

In October 2023, the [Turner Center for Housing Innovation at UC Berkeley](#) released the first in its series on Homelessness in California. They identified [Five Recent Trends in Homelessness in California](#):

1. The scale of California's homelessness crisis is larger than any other state and worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Stark racial and ethnic disparities in California's homelessness rates have continued to grow.
3. Unsheltered homelessness remains more common in California than any other state, and unsheltered chronic homelessness has grown more rapidly than homelessness overall.
4. Some of the largest increases in recent years have been in places that did not previously have high levels of homelessness, including suburban and rural areas of the state.
5. The range and scale of efforts to address homelessness have grown over time, including large expansions in shelter and housing capacity.

Bond Measure Funding.

The state of California can issue bonds that fund housing. General Obligation (G.O.) bonds must be approved by voters. Proposition 1 on the March 2024 ballot is a G.O. bond measure that would authorize \$6.38 billion for mental health treatment facilities (\$4.4 billion) and supportive housing for homeless veterans and homeless individuals with behavioral health challenges (\$2 billion).

At the end of the 2023 legislative session, there were ten other bond measures being considered by the Legislature. Although not all are for housing, if approved each will compete for voter support in November. Governor Newsom is [reported](#) to have indicated that he believes a total of \$26 billion in new bond authorizations in 2024 would be a prudent limit. However, a [state Senate committee analysis](#) on [AB 531 \(Irwin\)](#) states that "... all but 1.4% in outstanding debt is paid at a fixed rate of interest. While debt service is

⁶ [Housing Underproduction in California, CAYIMBY 2023 Report](#); [California has lost population and built more homes. Why is there still a housing crisis?](#), Cap Public Radio August 16, 2023; [California Housing Shortage, Wikipedia](#).. While we don't normally cite Wikipedia as a source, this article contains a particularly useful survey of the literature and rundown of the issue's history.

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currently a small part of the state's budget, every dollar spent on debt service reduces the funding that is available for other priorities.”⁷

One of the other possible bond measures is [AB 1657 \(Wicks\)](#), a \$10 billion bond measure that would replenish California's affordable housing program. There is also a proposed regional [housing bond measure](#), of between \$10-20 Billion, supported by the recently created Bay Area Housing Finance Authority that could be on the November 2024 ballot in the Bay Area. For all these measures any type of accurate projections are incomplete. The effect and the timing of the availability make the future unknown. But the funding from bond measures is not sufficient to provide all the housing that is needed.

California's Economy

While a great deal of attention is currently being paid to the [intersections between mental health needs and housing](#), the shortage of housing supply affects more than the unhoused with behavioral health needs. The majority of the unhoused are without a roof over their heads due to poverty.⁸ Nine out of ten people who are unhoused in California experienced their first housing loss while living in California. They were not homeless when they arrived. Less than a third without housing have behavioral health issues. They are impacted by high prices and insufficient wealth. Businesses or regional offices and the challenges of recruiting employees results in companies also leaving California. Even the public sector is affected.

The shortage of supply today will have an effect on many future decades due to the continuing departure of businesses and the perception about living in California. The [McKinsey Global Institute report](#) estimates that the **housing shortage is costing the California economy between \$143 and \$233 billion dollars per year**, from lost construction activity (at least \$85 billion annually), lower consumption of consumer goods because of high housing costs (at least \$53 billion annually) and the costs of providing services to the increased number of unhoused persons (at least \$5 billion per year).

According to a 2021 Forbes article entitled “[California's Housing Costs Threaten The State's Future](#),” newly developed housing is more difficult due to a “combination of single-family zoning, homeowner opposition to new development and suburban resistance to allowing multi-family houses...” California ranked lowest in the nation at the rate of new residential construction. Combined with increased cost California is now seeing a reduction in its population. That confluence of circumstances may hamstring California's entire economy. The challenges that businesses and regional offices have with recruiting employees also results in companies leaving California; even the public sector is affected.

⁷ The [Senate Governance and Finance Committee](#) also writes “California currently has \$67.9 billion of General Obligation (GO) bonds and \$8.1 billion of lease revenue debt outstanding, which is affordable.... California's comparability to other states is less favorable but has improved significantly.”

⁸ Kushel, M., Moore, T., et al. (2023). [Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#). UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative.

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Local Regulations Delay Construction

A recent report from California's Department of Housing and Community Development, the [San Francisco Housing Policy and Practice Review](#),⁹ cited evidence that San Francisco imposes additional requirements on developers that are not state requirements. For example, San Francisco takes an average of 523 days to issue a building permit, compared to 385 days for the next slowest jurisdiction in the state. Even a proposed apartment building that meets all of the city's rules and would be automatically approved in many California cities takes more than two years to get the green light in San Francisco.¹⁰ The danger is that San Francisco could lose funding from the state for not meeting the required timeline.

According to two prominent economists, if California rolled back its land use rules to where they stood in 1980, the state's population could ultimately grow to 18% of the country and U.S. gross domestic product could permanently increase by about \$375 billion.¹¹

There are no silver bullets or easy solutions to the growing lack of affordable housing and homelessness, and the multiple causes for the shortages. Still, it's critical that we continue to keep the issue before our elected representatives and to inquire about what public policy solutions they would support to address the problems.

⁹ More data related to the San Francisco report may be found [here](#).

¹⁰ Heather Knight, [California Slams San Francisco for 'Egregious' Barriers to Housing Construction](#), New York Times, October 25, 2023; Melissa Castro Wyatt [Professor Exposes Drivers of San Francisco's Housing Crisis](#); University of Virginia School of Law, November 1, 2023.

¹¹ Lee Ohanian, Edward Prescott, [What in the Sam Hill are Cows Doing on the Sand Hill Road?](#) Wall Street Journal, December 1, 2017.