



**CALIFORNIA STATE SENATOR**

**SUZETTE MARTINEZ  
VALLADARES**

REPRESENTING DISTRICT 23

## **Senate Bill 252 – CEQA: Underground Utility Lines**

### **Summary**

Senate Bill 252 would create an exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the undergrounding of power lines.

### **Background**

California is facing an escalating wildfire risk, with utility lines playing a significant role in sparking many of these destructive fires. High winds, downed power lines, and electrical malfunctions can easily ignite fires, putting communities, wildlife, and the environment at great risk. Historical examples, like the 2018 Camp Fire, show the devastating results that utility lines can cause when sparking wildfires.

The current state of utility lines in California is concerning, particularly with aging infrastructure and a heavy reliance on overhead power lines. Many of these lines were built decades ago and have not been upgraded to handle the increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions such as high winds, drought, and heat waves. Overhead power lines, often exposed to the elements, are highly vulnerable during severe weather. Strong winds can knock down these lines, while aging equipment is more prone to malfunctioning or sparking.

One key solution to reducing these fire hazards is undergrounding utility lines. By burying power lines, the risk of fire caused by downed or damaged lines during storms and high winds can be drastically reduced. This approach

provides a safer, more resilient power infrastructure.

Given the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires, it's crucial to fast-track the undergrounding of utility lines to prevent further devastation. The urgency of addressing these risks demands a swift, effective response.

One potential pathway for speeding up this process is seeking an exemption from CEQA. This exemption could eliminate time-consuming environmental review requirements and allow for quicker implementation of undergrounding projects, ultimately enhancing public safety, reducing wildfire risks and protecting the environment.

### **Proposal**

SB 252 would exempt from the provisions of CEQA a project to underground power lines.

### **Code Affected**

This bill would add section 21080.08 to the Public Resources Code.

### **Staff:**

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### **Supporters:**

*Pending*