

January 15, 2026

The Honorable Anna Caballero, Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, 412
Sacramento, CA 95814



BUILDING
DECARBONIZATION
COALITION

RE: SB 222 (Wiener) - Heat Pump Permitting - SPONSORS

Dear Senator Caballero,

On behalf of the Bay Area Air District, the Building Decarbonization Coalition Action Fund (BDC), and the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), we write to you as proud co-sponsors of SB 222 by Senator Wiener, the Heat Pump Access Act, which will modernize permitting and reduce installation costs for residential heat pump installations statewide.

California has set some of the nation's most ambitious targets to reduce carbon emissions, including a goal to install 6 million heat pumps statewide. This leaves 5 years to deploy over 4 million heat pumps—which will require quadrupling the current rate of installation. A heat pump installed in California today will cut emissions from space heating by 93% over the lifetime of the equipment compared to a gas furnace. In order to meet our climate and clean air targets, the state must make it easy, fast, and affordable for customers to install heat pump appliances.

In the spirit of meeting these goals, California has dedicated hundreds of millions of dollars to incentive programs, such as TECH Clean California, and the Equitable Building Decarbonization program, to reduce the up-front cost of electric appliances. These programs require applicants to secure an installation permit in order to be eligible for a rebate or direct install.

Unfortunately, the process for securing building permits in California is notoriously complex. Installation standards can vary significantly by jurisdiction, creating a patchwork of confusing and opaque requirements that are difficult for contractors and consumers to comply with. California has taken steps to standardize and clarify the permitting process for many industries, including housing (SB 35, Wiener), rooftop solar ([SB 379, Wiener](#); [AB 1132, Friedman](#)), and electric vehicle charging ([AB 1236, Chiu](#); [AB 970, McCarty](#)). However, beyond state building code, no such clarity exists for permitting heat pump water heaters and heat pump HVAC systems.

Permitting adds to an installation's total price in a number of ways. Interviews with heat pump installers point to permitting and inspection fees that can range from as low as fifty dollars to as high as several thousand, depending on both the jurisdiction and the size of the project. Completing the documentation required to secure a permit can also significantly drive up an installation's soft costs. Extensive plan review, site maps, unit specifications, and property

surveys can add thousands of dollars to the customer's bill, even for simple appliance swapouts.

Long timelines for permit approval can also drive up soft costs and push customers towards unpermitted work. While some jurisdictions are able to turn around heat pump permits and installations within 48 hours (such as through the City of Palo Alto's emergency water heater replacement program), contractors have cited waiting for months to receive permits in other municipalities due to extensive plan review and multiple inspections. After the permit is approved, installers also cited long time windows for scheduling inspections, often leading to significant lost labor hours.

Homeowners typically replace a water heater or HVAC system only when their old one breaks. Onerous permitting timelines or costs can drive many to install an appliance unpermitted, rather than go without hot water, heating, or cooling for weeks or months at a time. To drive electric appliance adoption and achieve cost-parity with fossil fuel appliances, California must address heat pump permitting.

The Heat Pump Access Act will take a comprehensive approach to standardizing the permitting process for heat pump installations statewide, reducing time constraints and lowering costs for contractors and consumers alike. SB 222 will limit the ability of local jurisdictions to impose code conditions or excessive cost on heat pump installations that go beyond state building standards; require maximum one permit for heat pump water heater installations; and prohibit HOAs from imposing architectural review standards that will prevent clean appliance adoption. SB 222 also requires jurisdictions to put in place an automated permitting process for standard heat pump swapouts, in line with previous efforts by the state to require automated permitting for solar and EV charging installations.

SB 222 does not preclude local jurisdictions from recovering the costs of implementing this measure. Under SB 222, jurisdictions are permitted to exceed fee caps if necessary, as long as the new fee is a flat fee that is clearly posted online. Some automated permitting services, such as Symbium, provide their services to cities completely free. These measures will give Californians clarity and consistency as to the cost required to install a heat pump, without posing an undue burden on cities.

For these reasons, we are proud to co-sponsor this important measure, and thank Senator Wiener for his leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely

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