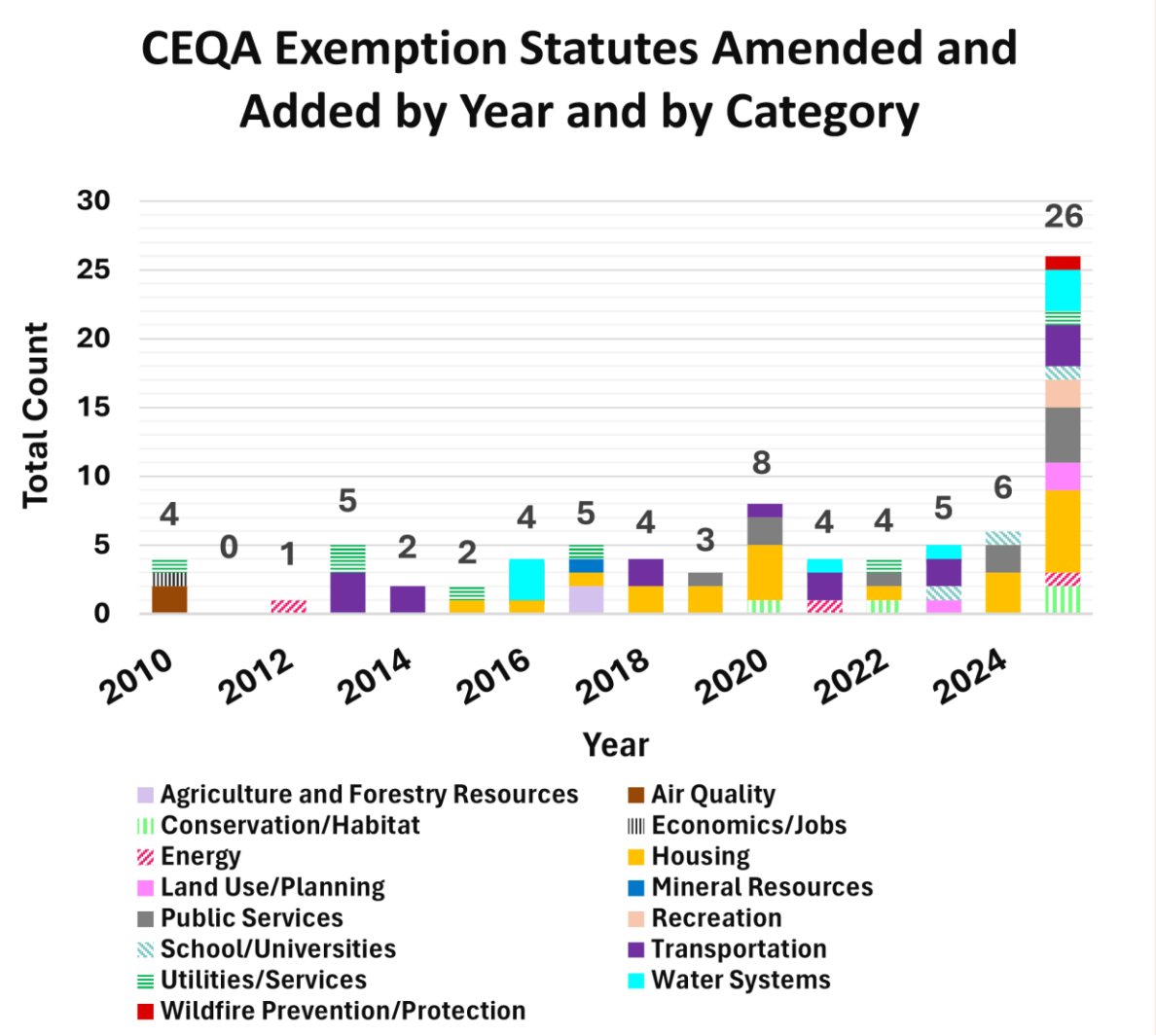
LEGISLATIVE TRENDS IN CEQA EXEMPTIONS (2010 – 2025)

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is one of the state's most significant environmental policies, requiring local agencies to evaluate and disclose environmental impacts prior to project approval. Today, critics view CEQA as a barrier to achieving statewide development goals while supporters defend strong CEQA protections for local community voices and environmental values.

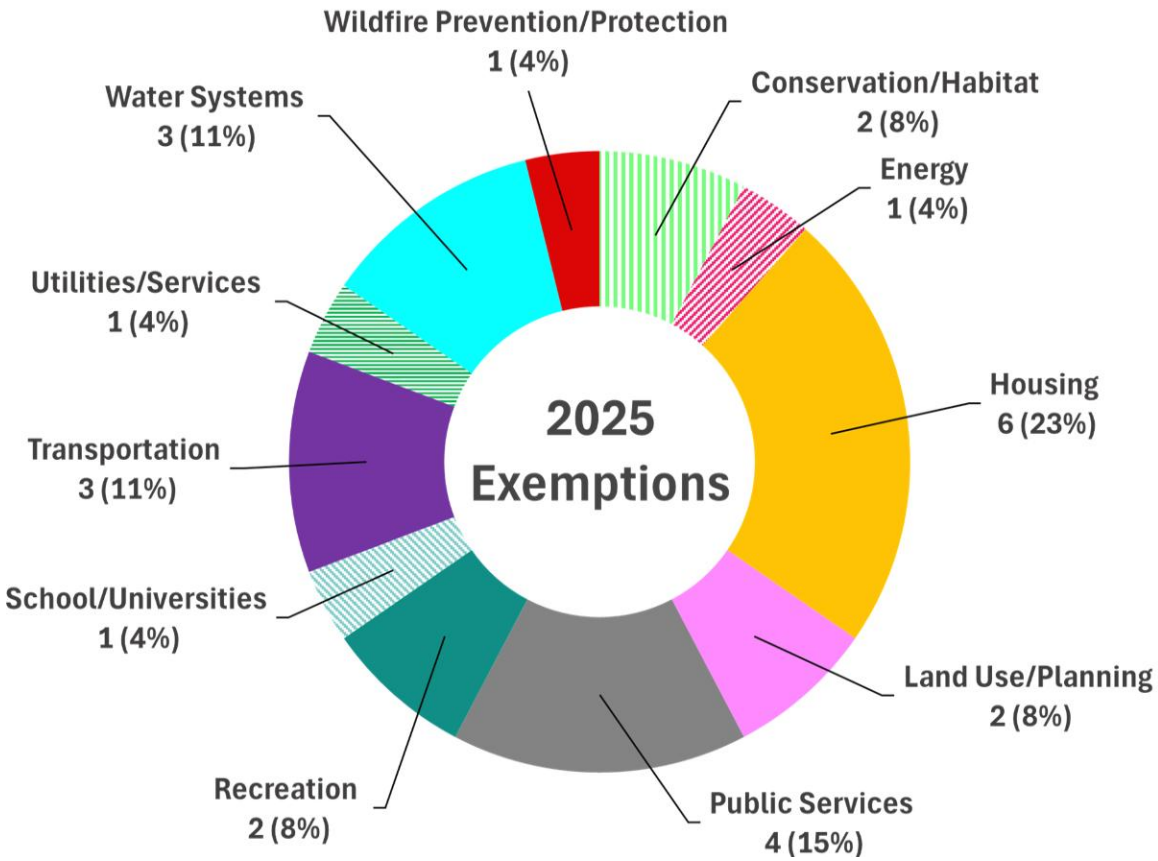
Recently, the Legislature has passed major reforms to reduce the barriers of CEQA review and litigation for certain types of projects. These reforms include exemptions, statutory provisions that allow projects to move forward without CEQA environmental review. As exemptions continue to increase, it is important for policymakers, local governments, and the public to understand the scope of projects that are covered under these exemptions and if they are effectively being used by project applicants. Since 2010, the Legislature has consistently passed CEQA exemptions for transportation and utility projects, while housing has become a dominant target for CEQA exemptions in recent years.



This chart shows the total number of CEQA exemption statutes that went into effect each year and the topic area of each statute. Most CEQA exemptions become effective the year after the corresponding bills are passed, but some become effective immediately upon bill passage. The same statute section may be represented more than once as the legislature chooses to modify existing statutes.

2025 CEQA Exemptions

Most years, the Legislature added or amended fewer than 10 CEQA exemptions, however, 2025 is a notable exception. Exemption types in 2025 were diverse with 10 project categories and 27 exemptions in total. A majority (51.8%) originated from three budget trailer bills: AB 130, SB 131, and SB 158. AB 130 and SB 131 aimed to increase housing through infill development and rezoning[1], new agricultural employee housing[2], transportation infrastructure[3], and wildfire protections[4]. The six housing-related exemption statutes addressed agriculture employee housing[2], ordinances for accessory dwelling unit (ADU) development[5], and mixed-use housing projects[6]. Within the public services category, exemptions were established for health clinics[7], homelessness services[8], day care centers[9], and the controversial exemption for advanced manufacturing[10].



This chart represents the total number of CEQA exemptions that became effective in 2025 by exemption topic area, including CEQA exemption statutes added or amended by bills passed in 2024 and 2025. The percentages are provided in parentheses.

Selected Public Resources Code (PRC) Statutes

1. PRC § 21080.66, PRC § 21080.085
2. PRC § 21080.45
3. PRC § 21080.25, PRC § 21080.70
4. PRC § 21080.49
5. PRC § 21080.17
6. PRC § 21159.25
7. PRC § 21080.69
8. PRC § 21080.10
9. PRC § 21080.69
10. PRC § 21080.69

Prepared by Christian Fuentes-Macias, Carlin Coleman, Shina Cortez Garcia, Estrella Silva, and Elizabeth Uemura for Melissa Sparks-Kranz and the League of California Cities.