



The Honorable Scott Wiener
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 6630
Sacramento, CA 95814

April 11, 2023

Re: Senate Bill 4 - Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act - Support

Dear Senator Wiener,

On behalf of Urban Environmentalists, Climate Resolve, Active San Gabriel Valley, East Bay for Everyone, Greenbelt Alliance, PLACE Initiative, the Council of Infill Builders, Livable Communities Initiative, and Abundant Housing LA, we write in support of Senate Bill (SB) 4, the Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act. This measure would make building affordable and inherently lower-carbon housing easier, faster, and cheaper on land owned by religious institutions and nonprofit colleges.

Per a study by the UC Berkeley Turner Center, there are approximately 38,800 acres of land—roughly the size of the city of Stockton—used for religious purposes that are potentially developable. A significant share of that acreage (45 percent) is located in the state’s “high” or “highest” resource opportunity areas: neighborhoods with lower poverty rates and greater economic, educational, and environmental amenities.

Due to their location efficiency near employment opportunities, a religious or educational institution, and likely other amenities, building housing in these locations will support inherently lower-carbon lifestyles because residents will not need to drive far to reach common destinations. As areas with a low pollution burden, expanding affordable housing in these locations will also support the cause of environmental justice. And as already-developed infill locations, this new housing will not contribute to habitat destruction or require the construction of additional roads or highways. Finally, high opportunity areas are likely to be more climate-resilient and require less energy-intensive heating and cooling than California’s fast-growing greenfield sprawl regions.

About our organizations

Urban Environmentalists empowers our network of 7,500 grassroots activists and coalition partners to transform cities and towns into more sustainable, human-centered, and just communities through land use policy reform. We are an initiative of YIMBY Action, a network of over 48,000 pro-housing activists fighting for more inclusive housing policies.

Building upon years of collaboration, ideation, and action from a diverse cross section of place-focused professionals, PLACE Initiative is focused on the role that



place plays in climate change and equity: Electric cars and renewable energy alone will not be sufficient to meet our 2050 climate goals, and urbanism is the missing link. However, our climate goals cannot be achieved when much of our society is held down by racial and social injustice; with the climate and social crises accelerating, the impact that urban growth and development policy plays on our planet's and society's future must be addressed. PLACE Initiative hopes to motivate a new generation that deeply believes climate and social solutions can wait no longer; it represents the importance of community, and, standing for the intersection of climate change and equity (Proactive Leadership Advocating for Climate and Equity), PLACE hopes to establish partnerships and grow leadership around policy change and advocacy to achieve people-centric solutions to the climate-driven challenges of our future. Abundant Housing LA is a pro-housing, nonprofit advocacy organization working to help solve Southern California's housing crisis. We support reforms to legalize more homes, make homes easier to build, increase funding for affordable housing, and protect tenants, which are all needed to make housing more affordable, improve access to jobs and transit, promote greater environmental sustainability, and advance racial and economic equity.

The Council of Infill Builders is a statewide organization of real estate professionals committed to improving California through infill development. The organization is dedicated to championing policies that make high-quality infill development easier, cheaper and faster to build.

More information about all of our organizations can be found on our respective websites.



We and our partners fight for better housing policies because we want to reduce poverty, end homelessness, eliminate racial segregation, and create jobs. And because as environmentalists, we know that better housing policies are essential to protect natural habitats and biodiversity, support environmental and transportation justice, and stop climate change. California's chronic housing shortage, especially acute in places with thriving economies and inherently low-carbon lifestyles, requires a transformation in how we make decisions about new housing of all kinds. We believe SB 4 is an important step in the right direction.

Our support for SB 4

Across California, religious organizations and non-profit colleges are seeking to partner with affordable housing developers to build critically needed affordable homes on their own land. Much of that land is currently dedicated to excessively large surface parking lots that contribute to fossil fuel car-dependency and exacerbate climate risks like the urban heat island effect and flash flooding—making affordable housing a particularly beneficial improvement. These organizations are long-standing community anchors and are driven by their values to support those most in need, care for our planet, and help address our homelessness and climate crises.

Unfortunately, the land that these organizations hold can often be locked into complicated and cost-prohibitive local zoning rules and regulations. These can range from standards which allow only a few units to be built on large parcels to others which limit any housing construction at all. The variety of red tape and obstacles in the way make development financially infeasible and discourage institutions from

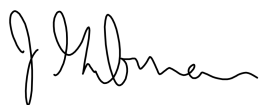
moving forward with projects that would benefit their low-income and unhoused neighbors, as well as our planet.

A 2022 report from the California Department of Housing and Community Development found that we need to build 1.2 million affordable homes over the next decade to meet our housing goals. Over the last few years, California has added an average of 19,000 affordable units a year. At this pace we will not reach our state goals without increased streamlining for affordable housing production.

SB 4 will streamline the building process and offer new tools for neighborhood leaders to build safe, stable, affordable homes for local residents and families. And it will support this new construction occurring in location-efficient, low-pollution, inherently low-carbon infill locations. This bill will allow places of worship to build 100% affordable housing projects, creating a valuable option in the midst of the state's housing and homelessness crises, while also supporting the state's climate and environmental justice goals. It also provides significant untapped benefits for religious organizations, from supporting an organization's charitable mission to providing revenue that can stabilize the organization's finances.

This is a common-sense opportunity for us to partner with trusted community leaders. The catastrophic tragedies we see on the street every day, as well as the accelerating pace of climate change, call for urgent and bold action and this bill will help us move forward. Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues and for all these reasons, we support this bill.

Sincerely,



Joanna Gubman
Executive Director
Urban Environmentalists



David Diaz, MPH
Executive Director
Active San Gabriel Valley



Zoe Siegel
Director of Climate Resilience
Greenbelt Alliance

The 2500 members of East Bay for Everyone



Garlynn Woodsong
Executive Director
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The 3000 members of the Livable Communities Initiative