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California Rewrote the Rules for AI and Technology This Year. Here Is What Became Law.

How could the 2025-26 session's AI and tech bills affect Californians?

On Sept. 30, Gov. Gavin Newsom finished acting on the more than 1,100 bills the Legislature sent him at the end of the 2025-26 session. A large share of them dealt with artificial intelligence and technology: lawmakers passed 26 AI-related bills as the session closed on Aug. 31, and Newsom signed most of the AI and privacy bills that reached his desk while vetoing a few.

This editorial profiles the major AI-facing and technology bills of the session, grouped by theme. For each, it summarizes what the bill does and answers the question: “How could this affect Californians?” Because the session is over, every bill below has a known outcome, listed in the status line.

By Shrey Agarwal - Staff Writer

> **Editor's note.** This profile covers real bills from California's 2025-26 legislative session rather than the student-submitted bills from our classroom simulation, which the writer did not have access to. The decision to focus on AI and technology was also inspired by the guest speaker from Caspar Donnivan who spoke to our class earlier in the course.

Where this builds from: SB 53

Most of this year's bills build on SB 53, the Transparency in Frontier Artificial Intelligence Act by Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco. Newsom signed it on Sept. 29, 2025, after vetoing Wiener's broader SB 1047 in 2024. SB 53 requires the largest AI developers to publish how they assess and reduce catastrophic risk, report serious safety incidents to the state, and protect whistleblowers. It took effect Jan. 1, 2026, and the attorney general can seek penalties of up to $1 million per violation. The 2026 bills push further: toward outside verification of AI systems, protections for children and workers, and clearer labeling of what is real.

Checking the Checkers: Outside Review of AI Systems

Independent AI Verification

SB 813 Sen. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton Signed Sept. 9, 2026

SB 813 creates a framework for certifying independent verification organizations: groups with the expertise and independence from AI companies to assess AI systems and models for compliance with state law. McNerney has said the bill carries out one of the main recommendations of the governor's expert panel on AI.

How could this affect Californians? Until now, state AI rules such as SB 53 have largely depended on companies publishing and describing their own safety practices. SB 813 sets up a path for someone outside the company to test those claims. How much that matters will depend on details the state still has to work out, such as who qualifies for certification and what companies must do with the findings.

State Registry for AI Auditors

AB 1405 Asm. Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, D-Orinda Signed Sept. 9, 2026

AB 1405 creates a state registry for AI auditors and sets standards for their independence, transparency and integrity. Bauer-Kahan argued that the public cannot expect industry to “grade its own homework.”

How could this affect Californians? If the auditors are credible, Californians affected by AI systems would have a better chance that someone other than the vendor has looked under the hood. The risk is the usual one with audits: a registry only builds trust if the standards are enforced.

Both bills are Democrat-sponsored, and Newsom paired the signing with a call for national rules from Congress. On Sept. 18 he also issued an executive order to speed up third-party oversight and convened experts, due to report within two months, who are weighing ideas such as independent safety plans and an emergency “kill switch” for frontier models.

Kids, Chatbots and Social Media

“Adam's Law” for Companion Chatbots

SB 1119 Sen. Steve Padilla, D-San Diego, with Asms. Buffy Wicks and Rebecca Bauer-Kahan Signed Sept. 10, 2026

Named for Adam Raine, SB 1119 updates California's existing companion chatbot law. It requires protections for children, including crisis protocols, parental controls, and notifications if a child turns off safety settings. It is also the first law in the country to require independent child-safety audits and annual risk assessments for these products.

How could this affect Californians? Parents in San Diego County and across the state gain tools and a legal floor for what companion chatbots must do when talking with minors. Companies face new costs: building the protocols, hiring auditors and completing yearly risk assessments. The bill builds on SB 243, the 2025 law that made California the first state with child protections around companion chatbots.

The bill was bipartisan in the governor's telling, and it carries a San Diego senator's name as lead author.

AI Chatbots in Toys

SB 867 Sen. Steve Padilla, D-San Diego Signed Sept. 10, 2026 SB 867 bans toys that contain companion chatbots for five years, according to the governor's office.

How could this affect Californians? Shoppers should see fewer talking toys powered by chatbots on California shelves. Toy makers will have to decide whether to redesign products for the state or pull them.

Under-16 Social Media Limits

AB 1709 Asm. Josh Lowenthal, D-Long Beach Signed Sept. 10, 2026

AB 1709 prohibits social media companies from giving users under 16 addictive features, such as autoplay and algorithmic feeds built on a user's history and profile.

How could this affect Californians? A 14-year-old's feed would look different: no autoplay, and no feed tailored to what they have watched. Platforms will need to know which users are under 16, which connects to 2025 laws on warning labels and age-verification signals. Expect debate over how well that works in practice.

AI at Work

The “No Robo Bosses Act”

SB 947 Sen. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton Signed Sept. 30, 2026

SB 947 bars employers from relying solely on an automated decision system to discipline or fire a worker. When AI is the primary basis for the decision, a human must corroborate it with other information, such as manager evaluations or personnel files, and the worker must receive written notice, a description of the data used and a human contact. The ban starts in July 2027.

How could this affect Californians? Workers facing discipline or termination get a right to know that software drove the decision and a person to ask about it. Employers using automated systems will need new review steps. Newsom vetoed an earlier version, SB 7, in October 2025, calling it overly broad, so the signature marks a reversal.

The California Labor Federation backed the bill, calling it one of four first-in-the-nation worker

protections. **Brain Data and Emotion Surveillance**

AB 1883 / AB 1331 Asms. Isaac Bryan, D-Los Angeles, and Sade Elhawary,

D-South Los Angeles Signed Sept. 30, 2026

AB 1883 bars employers from using AI-powered surveillance tools that collect workers' neural data or infer their emotional state. Civil penalties reach $500 per violation, enforced by the labor commissioner and public prosecutors. AB 1331 prohibits employers from monitoring workers in workplace bathrooms.

How could this affect Californians? Warehouse, call-center and office workers gain limits on monitoring that reaches into their bodies and moods. Newsom's signing message asked lawmakers to clarify the scope of both laws, a sign that employers and workers may see changes next session.

Notice of AI-Driven Layoffs

SB 951 Sen. Eloise Gómez Reyes, D-Colton Signed Sept. 30, 2026 SB 951 requires employers to say when a

mass layoff, relocation or termination is caused by an AI system.

How could this affect Californians? Laid-off workers and the public get a clearer picture of when technology is the reason jobs disappear, which matters as the state tracks AI's effect on employment. Labor leaders said they will renew pushes next year for ideas that fell short this year, including a ban on surveillance pricing.

Knowing What Is Real

AI Transparency Act Updates

SB 1000 / AB 2713 Sen. Josh Becker, D-Menlo Park, and Asm. Buffy Wicks,

D-Oakland Signed Sept. 30, 2026

These bills strengthen the California AI Transparency Act, first signed in 2024. Under the updates, deleting a digital watermark is prohibited, and people can get access to metadata that helps show whether content was made by AI or by a person.

How could this affect Californians? Someone trying to tell whether a video or image is synthetic gets better tools,

and those who strip labels off AI content face legal risk. The protections are only as strong as the platforms and tools that carry the labels.

AI Performers in Advertising

SB 1050 Sen. Angelique Ashby, D-Sacramento Signed Sept. 16, 2026

SB 1050 requires explicit disclosure on any video or audio advertisement that uses AI-generated performers, and bars continued use of an ad found in violation. The bill was sponsored by SAG-AFTRA.

How could this affect Californians? Viewers will be told when the person selling them something is synthetic. Advertisers using AI actors take on a compliance step, and human performers gain some protection against being

replaced without notice.

Health Care

Doctors Keep the Final Call

AB 1979 / SB 503 Asm. Mia Bonta, D-Oakland, and Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson, D-San Diego Signed Sept. 30, 2026

Together, the health bills ensure that doctors and licensed providers can use their own professional judgment when AI or other clinical decision tools are involved in care. They also require developers of clinical decision tools to take reasonable steps to reduce known or predictable bias.

How could this affect Californians? Patients should be less likely to see a clinician's judgment overridden by software. Developers of clinical tools take on a duty to look for bias, though what counts as “reasonable steps” will be tested over time.

What Newsom Vetoed

Not every tech bill survived. Newsom vetoed SB 903, which would have regulated AI in psychotherapy services, and a smart-glasses privacy bill, writing that its definition of a wearable recording device was broad enough to reach some smartwatches. Labor leaders also say several priorities fell short this year. Readers should check the bill text and the governor's veto letters for the full reasoning.

What It Adds Up To

Taken together, these bills show a Legislature and governor moving from asking AI companies to disclose, as in SB 53, to asking outsiders to verify, and from broad frontier-model fights to concrete protections for kids, workers and patients. Newsom, in his final year in office, also asked Washington for national rules. The governor elected in November and the next Legislature will inherit the job of writing the regulations and enforcing them, and the details in those rules will decide how much of this reaches Californians' daily lives.

October 7, 2026 - CalMatters-style classroom simulation

Sources

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