Fresno Bee

CALIFORNIA SENATOR BILLS AND RURAL CALIFORNIA

On September 30th, 2026, California Senators took to Sacramento to submit their bills for the 2026 Legislative Session. With bills covering healthcare, housing, environment, and affordability in the state, we ask: How do the rural bills proposed by California Senators, Republicans and Democrats, impact rural Fresno County and surrounding areas?



AGRICULTURE IN FRESNO COUNTY

In 2026, 96.4% of Fresno County is classified as rural, home to rural towns such as Coalinga, Firebaugh, Fowler, Huron, Kerman, Kingsburg, Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Reedley, San Joaquin, and Sanger. Rural areas, due to a lack of funding, investment, and infrastructure, experience a lack of medical resources, housing, and attention to substance issues. In the 2026 Legislative session, California Senators address the needs of rural communities through the following proposed bills.

RURAL EXPANSION HOUSING ACT

SB-4 Rural Expansion Housing Act, introduced by Republican Senator Roger (D-6), plans to add and invest in housing in rural areas. Restrictions on the Rural Expansion Housing Act relate to property size, project density, site sensitivity, surrounding infrastructure, and tribal territories. The property must be over 40 acres, meet a density of 5 units per acre, and cannot interfere with warehouse, oil, or gas infrastructure.



IMPACT ON FRESNO COUNTY

In Fresno County, the population experiences extremely high rents, high eviction rates, and a shortage of affordable homes for middle- and lower-class families. Considering this, policy regarding rural housing is desperately needed in Fresno County.

An aspect not considered in this bill is funding. The Rural Expansion Housing Act also does not have a set fiscal limit or a funding plan, leaving uncertainty for the project.

An additional concern would be price gouging among landlords. If a housing agency can buy multiple homes at once, taking away affordable housing from those intended to benefit from it, how can we ensure corporations are regulated?

HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND RURAL PROGRAM

Rural communities are prioritized in Senator Melissa Hurtado's bill, SB-26 Healthcare Access and Rural Program. Hurtado's bill aims to bring accessible and affordable healthcare through means of transportation from rural areas to doctors' appointments in near cities or towns. These services are planned to be provided by Metro Micro, an on-demand ride-share form of public transit, operated in the LA Area. These services would benefit the elderly, the disabled, or anyone without the means to provide transportation for themselves or their loved ones.



IMPACT ON FRESNO COUNTY

In Fresno County, rural towns are 25 minutes to an hour away from healthcare hubs, such as the city of Fresno. This distance can create barriers for low-income families, disabled people, and elderly people, making attending necessary medical appointments impossible to attend.

With Senator Hurtado's SB-26 Healthcare Access and Rural Program Bill, Fresno County can greatly benefit. The bill states that it will prioritize District 16, located in Santa Clara and San Mateo county, but will not be a local program, with ability to be applied to the entire state of California.

RURAL WILDFIRE REDUCTION ACT

Senator Dave Cortese of District 15 also plans to benefit the rural counties of California through the SB-44 Rural Wildfire Reduction Act. Aspiring to alleviate high wildfire risks in rural areas through the prioritization of fuel reduction when considering vegetation management projects. SB-44 states that these efforts to reduce rural wildfires include, but are not limited to, “creating strategic fuel breaks, removing dead or dry vegetation, thinning overgrown vegetation, controlled burning, or other methods used to reduce wildfire fuel.” The bill targets the flammable vegetation that allows rural wildfires to spread.



IMPACT ON FRESNO COUNTY

As of October 2026, Fresno County had 10 wildfires in 2026 alone, destroying agriculture, homes, and thousands of acres of land. With the SB-44 Rural Wildfire Reduction Act, California has an opportunity to limit natural disasters and protect our valley’s water.

Water is a valuable resource, in and outside of Fresno County; necessary to our valley’s farmers and agricultural workers. The protection of our water systems is essential for the success of the valley and for preserving our waterways. This bill plans to work alongside the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to ensure the success of this program, if passed through California’s Legislation.

RURAL YOUTH PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

SB-67, Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R-4)'s bill for the 2026-27 Legislative session, the California Republican proposes a program that targets behavioral health in youth and substance abuse in the Central Valley. Rural Youth Prevention and Early Intervention Program aims to bridge gaps between youth in rural communities and behavioral health and substance-abuse prevention programs. Financial funding for the program would come from grants through the Department of Health Care Services.

IMPACT ON FRESNO COUNTY

Across Fresno County, substance-abuse-related deaths have skyrocketed, creating worry among youth. With the Rural Youth Prevention and Early Intervention Program Bill, Fresno County schools can collaborate with substance-abuse prevention programs to protect students and their health.



This bill would also create family support and allow more access to existing behavioral-health or substance-use services. Fresno County youth and their families can navigate substance abuse through grant-funded programs to support their health.

Fresno County



Across these four bills, rural California, especially in the Central Valley, can benefit greatly in housing, wildfire response, healthcare, and substance abuse prevention among youth. These problems in the valley are bipartisan issues. Considering how much the entire state benefits from the agricultural hub in Fresno County, benefiting the workforce through accessible healthcare resources and addressing housing issues aids the valley immensely.

Over the course of these few weeks, our state's lawmakers will decide if these bills can function as they intend to and determine if they can be added to our state's legislation. Until then, we ask: will California lawmakers keep the interests of the Central Valley in mind? Or will Fresno County and other counties in the Central Valley be failed to consider in legislative decisions?