April 29th, 2026

The Honorable Sabrina Cervantes
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA

RE: Support for SB 894 – The Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act

Dear Senator Cervantes,

As firefighters, mitigation professionals, foresters, technologists, scientists, policy experts, researchers, industry leaders, and community advocates, we write in strong support of SB 894 (Sen. Ben Allen), as amended on April 23, 2026, the Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act.

California faces two intertwined crises: homes burning at unprecedented levels and an insurance market strained by escalating catastrophe risk. According to CAL FIRE, 2.12 million homes sit in the highest hazard areas. Most were built before modern wildfire construction standards and defensible space requirements existed. We know what works to reduce structure loss. Peer-reviewed research shows that defensible space combined with home hardening can reduce the risk of home destruction by more than 35 percent. Yet adoption remains far too low.

Large-scale landscape and fuels reduction projects are typically planned, funded, and executed by public agencies or their contractors. Structure-level mitigation is different. Protecting homes depends on millions of individual homeowners making capital investments in defensible space and flame- and ember-resistant home renovations.

If the state expects mitigation at scale, it must recognize that while the government cannot retrofit every home, it can catalyze the market. The responsibility of the state is to lower financial barriers, unlock private capital, and make resilience affordable for middle-income families who want to act but lack access to upfront financing.

For many homeowners, wildfire mitigation is not a question of awareness or willingness—it is a question of affordability. Wildfire safety upgrades such as ember-resistant vents, hardened decks, enclosed eaves, and defensible space improvements can cost thousands of dollars, and comprehensive home hardening packages can reach approximately $15,000 to achieve a strong wildfire resilience standard comparable to the IBHS Wildfire Prepared Home baseline.[1] Families are asked to make a large, immediate investment to reduce a future risk. That financial barrier significantly limits adoption.

SB 894 by Senator Ben Allen would address this challenge by establishing the California Wildfire Resilience Loan Program, administered by State Treasurer's CAEATFA and modeled after the successful GoGreen financing platform. Findings from a Megafire Action-commissioned survey conducted in 2026 among homeowners in high wildfire risk areas confirms this challenge. Cost is the most commonly cited barrier to completing wildfire safety upgrades, identified by roughly 50 percent of homeowners regardless of income or home value. When presented with a realistic retrofit scenario costing $15,000, 40 percent of homeowners said they would prefer to finance the improvements with a low-interest loan rather than paying the full amount upfront, compared to 22 percent who would pay the full cost out of pocket.

SB 894 creates a state-backed loan-loss reserve that leverages public or alternative capital to unlock private lending, lower interest rates, and finance home hardening and defensible space improvements. In

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[1] This estimate is drawn from a comparison of Headwaters Economics analysis of mitigation project costs (https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Wildfire_Retrofit_Report_R5.pdf) and IBHS Wildfire Prepared Home Base standards (https://ibhs.org/ibhs-news-releases/ibhs-releases-updated-wildfire-prepared-home-standard/). The estimate includes Zone 0 landscaping from 0-5 feet from a home, but excludes other defensible space work from 5-30 feet and excludes roof replacements with Class A or equivalent alternatives out of an assumption that these interventions are already required for many high-risk homes. The estimate assumes a two-story, 1000 sq-ft home.

the GoGreen program, each $1 of public funds has leveraged approximately $12 in private capital, dramatically expanding the impact of public investment.[2]

This financing structure allows modest state funding to reach far more homes than traditional grant programs. For example, retrofits costing roughly $15,000 to reach the research-backed IBHS Wildfire Prepared Base standard could be supported with approximately $1,250 in public credit enhancements under a 12:1 leverage model. This allows $1 million in state funding to enable roughly 800 home hardening projects. By comparison, $1 million in state-funded grants of an equivalent size would only reach 67 homeowners, not accounting for potentially higher costs of administration. In the case of California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP) grants, which are mitigating homes to a higher standard at an average cost of $49,000 per home, $1 million dollars of grant funds can only reach 20 homes, a level of investment that the state will struggle to maintain if/when FEMA funding lapses.[3] While those projects provide important demonstration value and grants will remain important for serving the lowest-income Californians, they are not structured to scale to the millions of homes exposed to wildfire risk across the state.

The loan-based approach proposed in SB 894 complements these efforts by enabling large-scale homeowner participation. Loan repayments recycle into new lending, allowing the same pool of public funds to support mitigation projects year after year in a sustainable fashion. Because the program builds on CAEATFA's existing financing infrastructure and relies on private lenders to originate loans, it can also operate with significantly lower administrative overhead than stand-alone grant programs. GoGreen has already served more than 16,000 homeowners across the state, including 387 in Riverside County.[4]

This approach follows a well-established pattern in other resilience and clean energy markets. In residential solar, adoption accelerated dramatically once affordable financing became widely available (loans represented 58 percent of the residential solar market in 2023). Wildfire mitigation faces the same structural challenge: motivated homeowners often lack access to affordable financing that allows costs to be spread over time.

By using financial leverage and focusing on a mitigation standard designed for broad homeowner adoption rather than only the most expensive retrofits, this legislation could enable scarce taxpayer dollars to potentially reach 40 times as many homeowners as current grant-based approaches. That impact is further magnified when that money is spent on mitigation work; an Earth Economics report found "that each dollar invested in retrofitting homes ripples throughout the economy and returns about $1.70 in total economic activity."

SB 894 represents an opportunity for the legislature to take immediate action on a concept highlighted by the recently released SB 254 Natural Catastrophe Study—"Piloting a State-supported loan loss or loan guarantee program would provide security or guarantee to capital lenders lending low-cost loans to homeowners."

[2] https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/sites/default/files/caeatfa/202602-past-monthly-data-summary.pdf
[3] https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/CWMP/California-Wildfire-Mitigation-Program-Authority-Status-Report-04.2026.pdf
[4] https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/sites/default/files/caeatfa/202602-past-monthly-data-summary.pdf

Reducing structure vulnerability protects families, lowers suppression and recovery costs, stabilizes insurance markets, gives firefighters greater safety and odds of success in suppression operations, and limits post-fire environmental damage. SB 894 represents a practical, fiscally responsible solution to one of the most significant barriers to mitigation at scale: access to capital.

We respectfully urge your support for SB 894.

Signed,

Eric Horne, California Director, on behalf of Megafire Action
Chris Anthony, Founder and CEO, on behalf of FireWERX
Jessica Martinez, Interim Executive Director, on behalf of California Fire Safe Council
Sam Uden, Co-Founder and Managing Director, on behalf of Net-Zero California
Enrique Huerta, Senior Director, Policy and Legislation, on behalf of Climate Resolve
Nuin-Tara Key, Chief Operating Officer, on behalf of California Forward
Aaron Babcock, County Coordinator, on behalf of Nel Norte Fire Safe Council
David Barrett, Executive Director, on behalf of Safe Community Project
Clemente Mojica, President and CEO, on behalf of Neighborhood Partnership Housing Services
Jason Brooks, Founder and CEO, on behalf of Fire Aside
Ryan Valdez, Chief Operating Officer, on behalf of RockRose Risk
Paul Mason, V.P., Policy & Incentives, on behalf of Pacific Forest Trust
Amy Berry, CEO, on behalf of Tahoe Fund
Anne-Marie Parkinson, Executive Director, on behalf of Santa Barbara Fire Safe Council
Ryan Reed, Program Director, on behalf of FireGeneration Collaborative
Cathy Cockrum Dean, President and Founder, on behalf of Elevate California
Katelyn Roedner Sutter - Senior Director, California, Environmental Defense Fund
Dan Munsey, Fire Chief of the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District, on behalf of himself
Adan Ortiz, Fresno County Resident, on behalf of himself
Alexander Meeks, on behalf of himself
Michael Jarred, Associate Director, on behalf of The Nature Conservancy
Joe Nordlinger, Chief Executive Officer, on behalf of Napa Communities Firewise Foundation
Nicole Quiñonez, on behalf of CalChamber
Lolly Lim, Sr. Program Manager for Climate Equity, on behalf of Greenlining Institute
Anika Kimme, Government Affairs Program Assistant, on behalf of Sierra Business Council
Mark Brown, Executive Officer, on behalf of Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority