

Assembly Bill No. 838

CHAPTER 351

An act to add Section 17970.5 to the Health and Safety Code, relating to building standards.

[Approved by Governor September 28, 2021. Filed with
Secretary of State September 28, 2021.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 838, Friedman. State Housing Law: enforcement response to complaints.

Existing law, the State Housing Law, a violation of which is a crime, establishes statewide construction and occupancy standards for buildings used for human habitation. Existing law authorizes a city or county to designate and charge a specified department or officer with the enforcement of the State Housing Law, the building standards published in the California Building Standards Code, or any other rules and regulations adopted pursuant to the State Housing Law for the protection of the public health, safety, and general welfare.

Existing law deems a building, portion of a building, or premises on which a building is located to be a substandard building if any one of specified conditions exists to the extent that it endangers the life, limb, health, property, safety, or welfare of the public or its occupants. Existing law deems a building, portion of a building, or premises on which a building is located to be in violation of the State Housing Law if it contains lead hazards, as specified, that are likely to endanger the health of the public or the occupants.

This bill would, beginning July 1, 2022, require a city or county that receives a complaint of a substandard building or a lead hazard violation, as described above, from a tenant, resident, or occupant, or an agent of a tenant, resident, or occupant, except as specified, to inspect the building, portion of the building intended for human occupancy, or premises of the building, document the lead hazard violations that would be discovered based upon a reasonably competent and diligent visual inspection of the property, and identify any building, portion of a building intended for human occupancy, or premises on which such a building is located that is determined to be substandard, as applicable. The bill would require the city or county, as applicable, to advise the owner or operator of each violation and of each action that is required to be taken to remedy the violation and to schedule a reinspection to verify correction of the violations. The bill would require a city or county to provide free, certified copies of an inspection report and citations issued, if any, to the complaining tenant, resident, occupant, or agent, and to all potentially affected tenants, residents, occupants, or the

agents of those individuals, as specified. The bill would prohibit the inspection or the report from being subject to any unreasonable conditions, as specified, and prohibit a city, county, or city and county from collecting a fee, cost, or charge from a property owner or property owner's agent for any inspection of, or any inspection report about, that owner's or agent's property that is conducted or issued pursuant to the bill's provisions, unless the inspection reveals one or more material lead hazard violations or deems and declares the property substandard, as described above. The bill would prohibit a city or county from unreasonably refusing to communicate with a tenant, resident, occupant, or agent regarding a matter covered by this bill.

By imposing new duties on local government officials, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for specified reasons.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 17970.5 is added to the Health and Safety Code, to read:

17970.5. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this part, a city or county that receives a complaint from a tenant, resident, or occupant, or an agent of a tenant, resident, or occupant, regarding a potential violation of Section 17920.10 or regarding a building being substandard pursuant to Section 17920.3 shall do all of the following:

(1) Inspect the building or portion thereof intended for human occupancy, including any dwelling unit, guestroom, or suite of rooms, or the premises on which it is located, that may be in violation of Section 17920.10 or that may be substandard pursuant to Section 17920.3.

(2) Document any violations of Section 17920.10 that would be discovered based upon a reasonably competent and diligent visual inspection of the property and identify any building or portion thereof intended for human occupancy, including any dwelling unit, guestroom, or suite of rooms, or the premises on which it is located, that is determined to be substandard pursuant to Section 17920.3, as applicable. The documentation shall be included in the inspection report described in subdivision (d).

(3) As applicable, advise the owner or operator of each violation and of each action that is required to be taken to remedy the violation and schedule a reinspection to verify correction of the violations.

(b) A city or county shall perform an inspection conducted pursuant to subdivision (a) at least as promptly as that city or county conducts an inspection in response to a request for final inspection pursuant to Section 110 of the California Building Code.

(c) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) and (b), a city or county is not required to conduct an inspection in response to either of the following types of complaints:

(1) A complaint that does not allege one or more substandard conditions.

(2) A complaint submitted by a tenant, resident, or occupant who, within the past 180 days, submitted a complaint about the same property that the chief building inspector or their designee reasonably determined, after inspection, was frivolous or unfounded.

(d) A city or county shall provide free, certified copies of an inspection report and citations issued pursuant to this section, if any, to the complaining tenant, resident, occupant, or their agent. If inspection reveals a condition potentially affecting multiple tenants, residents, or occupants, including, but not limited to, conditions relating to the premises, common areas, or structural features, then the city or county shall provide free copies of the inspection report and citations issued to all potentially affected tenants, residents, occupants, or their agents.

(e) A city, county, or city and county shall not collect a fee, cost, or charge from a property owner or property owner's agent for any inspection of, or any inspection report about, that owner's or agent's property that is conducted or issued pursuant to this section, unless the inspection reveals one or more material violations of Section 17920.10 or deems and declares the property substandard pursuant to Section 17920.3.

(f) Nothing in this section limits or alters the existing authority of a city, county, or city and county to impose fees on rental property owners to support a rental property inspection program, or to otherwise impose generally applicable charges, fees, or assessments to cover the costs of inspections or inspection reports required by this section.

(g) An inspection or report required by this section shall not be subject to any unreasonable conditions, including any requirements that:

(1) The tenant, resident, occupant, or agent first make a demand for correction upon the owner of the property.

(2) The tenant be current on rent.

(3) The tenant otherwise be in compliance with their rental agreement.

(4) The tenant, resident, or occupant not be involved in a legal dispute with the owner of the property.

(h) A city or county shall not unreasonably refuse to communicate with a tenant, resident, occupant, or the agent of a tenant, resident, or occupant regarding any matter covered by this section.

(i) The requirements of this section shall not be construed to impose a mandatory duty pursuant to Section 815.6 of the Government Code, and shall not be construed to affect the availability of any immunity otherwise applicable to the city or county or its employees, including, but not limited to, Sections 818.2, 818.4, 818.6, 820.2, 821, 821.2, and 821.4 of the Government Code.

(j) (1) An action to enforce the requirements of this section shall be brought pursuant to Section 1085 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

(2) For purposes of Section 1085 of the Code of Civil Procedure, the requirements of this section shall be construed as acts which the law specially enjoins, as a duty resulting from an office, trust, or station.

(k) This section shall become operative July 1, 2022.

SEC. 2. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because a local agency or school district has the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to pay for the program or level of service mandated by this act, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, and because the only other costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district under this act would result from a legislative mandate that is within the scope of paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution.