

[CALIFORNIA](#)

California rolls out sweeping new laws for 2026, from cellphone limits in schools to a ban on cat declawing

A slew of new laws in California have gone into effect, including a ban on law enforcement officers wearing masks, cuts to the cost of insulin and a requirement for landlords to provide refrigerators.

(Los Angeles Times photo illustration; Photos via Getty Images)

By [Katie King](#) and [Phil Willon](#)

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SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gavin Newsom’s office this week described 2025 as “the year that would not end.” But it has, and in its aftermath comes a slew of new laws passed that year that will affect the lives of almost every Californian.

The governor signed [nearly 800 bills last year](#), including legislation that caps the cost of insulin, streamlines California State University admissions and temporarily allows sexual assault claims that are past the statute of limitations. He also approved legislation banning law enforcement officers from wearing masks to hide their identities during operations — a law that’s already being challenged in court by the Trump administration.

Some of the new state laws were passed years ago and are just now taking effect.

“These new laws reflect who we are: a state that protects workers, respects students, puts people before politics, and isn’t afraid to hold powerful interests accountable,” Newsom said in a Tuesday statement.

Most of the laws listed below take effect on New Year’s Day. As in years past, the list mostly reflects the interests of the Democrats who hold a supermajority in both the state Senate and Assembly and hold every statewide office in California, including the governorship.

Here are a few notable laws going into effect:

Health



(Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

Fertility treatments: Large employer health plans will be required to cover infertility treatments, including in vitro fertilization, for everyone, regardless of marital status, gender identity or sexual orientation. “California is a proud reproductive freedom state — and that includes increasing access to fertility services that help those who want to start a family,” Newsom said after [signing the bill](#) in 2024. The governor later pushed to delay implementation [of state Senate Bill 729](#) until 2026. IVF costs Californians an average of \$24,000 out of pocket, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Cheaper insulin: Large group health plans must cap the out-of-pocket costs for insulin at \$35 for a 30-day supply [under SB 40](#). Roughly 3.5 million adults have diagnosed diabetes in California, according to the American Diabetes Assn. “Many Americans with diabetes have made the difficult decision to ration this lifesaving medication to pay for other necessities, such as groceries or rent,” said Christine Fallabel, the association’s state government affairs director, in a news release. “This legislation will provide much-needed financial relief.” [California will also start selling \\$11 insulin pens](#) through the state’s prescription program, CalRx, on Jan. 1.

Privacy for providers: Healthcare providers and employees affiliated with gender-affirming services can have their residential addresses withheld from certain public record requests. [Assembly Bill 82](#) allows these providers to submit applications for increased privacy to the California secretary of state if they are experiencing harassment or violent threats due to the nature of their work. California already allows those working in reproductive healthcare to apply.

Protection for immigrants: Healthcare officials are [prohibited from disclosing a patient's immigration status](#) or birthplace and from giving immigration authorities access to nonpublic spaces in hospitals and clinics without a search warrant or court order. The protections under [SB 81](#) are among new laws to protect immigrants in California, Newsom said, from the “secret police” of President Trump and Stephen Miller, the White House advisor who has driven the second Trump administration’s surge of immigration enforcement in Democratic-led cities.

Law enforcement and legal rights



(Carlin Stiehl / Los Angeles Times)

Mask ban: Law enforcement officers must visibly display their name or badge number during operations and are also [banned from wearing masks](#) that conceal their identities

while on duty, with some exceptions. SB [805](#) and SB [627](#) were introduced in response to the Trump administration's aggressive immigration raids in Southern California, which in many cases were conducted by masked agents in unmarked cars. Newsom has said it's unacceptable for "secret police" to grab people off the streets. The U.S. Department of Justice is [suing California](#) over the new laws, arguing both are unconstitutional and could put officers in danger.

Sexual assault reporting: A two-year window is opening to report sexual assault claims — cases that previously would have been barred because of the statute of limitations — against private employers or institutions that engaged in a "cover-up." The time frame starts Jan. 1 and expires Dec. 31, 2027. AB [250](#) applies to those who were assaulted after age 18. The state already created an extension for [child sexual assault victims](#) in 2020. "AB 250 gives those who've been silenced by intimidation, shame, or institutional cover-ups another shot at justice, because survivors deserve to be heard, believed, and supported," Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia M. Aguiar-Curry (D-Winters) said in October.

Amicable divorce: California couples seeking an amicable dissolution of their marriage will now have an easier, less costly way to go their separate ways. [Under SB 1427](#), which passed in 2024, couples will be allowed to file [a joint petition for dissolution of their marriage or legal separation](#). Until now, filing a joint petition was permitted only in limited circumstances, including when the couple had been married for fewer than five years and where their community property assets were worth less than \$25,000. In all other cases, the couple had to navigate a more onerous legal process.

Consumer protections and laws

Buh-bye plastic bags: Plastic bags at grocery store checkout stands are banned [under a law that was passed in 2024](#). Stores can offer recycled paper bags or customers can bring in their own bags. The change under [SB 1053](#) comes almost a decade after California voters passed a statewide ballot measure that banned single-use plastic bags at grocery store checkouts. At many stores, those were replaced with thicker plastic carryout bags that were considered reusable and could be recycled. But in reality, many customers used them just once and tossed them.

Food delivery: Food delivery services including Uber Eats, DoorDash and Postmates will be required to provide a full refund to customers if their order is not delivered, or if the wrong order is delivered. [Under AB 578](#), food delivery services also must provide customer service support, staffed by actual people, to help resolve requests for refunds.

Rental car estimates: Rental car companies will be required to provide customers with a good-faith estimate of the total charges, including taxes and fees, when providing

a price quote for a reservation. [Under AB 1374](#), the companies also must disclose whether the vehicles are gas-powered or electric or use another fuel source.

Volume control: Video streaming services under [SB 576](#) will be prohibited from airing advertisements that are louder than the shows or other video content they are providing. Federal law already bans that practice on broadcast stations and cable channels.

Overdraft fees: State-chartered credit unions are prohibited from charging overdraft fees exceeding \$14 or the amount set by the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, whichever is lower. [SB 1075](#) was passed and signed into law in 2024.

Business, workers and technology

Minimum wage increase: The state minimum wage [increases](#) from \$16.50 to \$16.90 on Jan. 1. Some counties and cities, including Los Angeles, already have higher local minimum wage requirements. Workers paid less than minimum wage can file a [wage theft claim](#) with the California labor commissioner's office. [The state's labor laws apply to workers regardless of immigration status.](#)

New state holiday: Diwali, also known as the “Festival of Lights,” has been added to California's official list of statewide holidays. This means public schools can close and state employees can elect to take the day off. Diwali typically occurs in late October or early November and is celebrated by members of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain faiths. It symbolizes the victory of light over darkness. [AB 268](#) makes California the third state to recognize the holiday, following Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

Deleting social media: Major social media platforms are required to provide users with a button in the account settings that allows them to delete their account — and make that button accessible on any format used to access the platform, including cellphones, computers and tablets. [AB 656](#), passed in 2025, also requires social media platforms to delete the personal information in a user's account when they cancel.

Protecting kids from AI: Artificial intelligence companies are required [to notify users younger than 18](#) at least every three hours to take a break and that the chatbot is not human. They are also required to implement “reasonable measures” to prevent companion chatbots from generating sexually explicit content. [SB 243](#) was enacted to prevent the production of suicide or self-harm content and put in protections, such as referring users to a suicide hotline or crisis text line.

AI and public safety: Large artificial intelligence companies will be required to [publicly disclose their security protocols](#) and reports of critical safety incidents. [SB 53](#) will require companies to disclose their safety and security protocols and risk evaluations. It mandates reporting of critical incidents — such as cyberattacks or unsafe behavior by autonomous AI systems — to the state’s Office of Emergency Services. Violations of the new law can bring civil penalties of up to \$1 million against companies.

Less red tape for restaurants: The approval process for independent restaurants that want to retrofit spaces is being streamlined under [AB 671](#). “For too long, opening a restaurant in California has meant endless hurdles and frustrating delays,” said the bill’s author, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland), in October. “We’re making it easier for small restaurateurs to turn their ideas into reality.”

Lyft and Uber drivers can unionize: Hundreds of thousands of ride-hail drivers can unionize and bargain collectively while still being classified as independent contractors. Wicks, who co-authored [AB 1340](#) with Assemblymember Marc Berman (D-Menlo Park), [previously said](#) this will allow drivers to “bargain for better pay and protections, and help build a future where the gig economy works for the people behind the wheel.” The law was a compromise between labor groups and Silicon Valley gig economy companies.

More oil: [Oil production can ramp up](#) in Central California. [SB 237](#) will allow up to 2,000 new wells annually in Kern County, effective through 2036. The law, which drew ire from environmentalists, is intended to prevent a spike in gas prices amid refinery closures.

Education

Direct admissions: Public high school students who meet the California State University’s minimum eligibility requirements will be [automatically admitted](#) and able to enroll at one of 16 CSU campuses. [SB 640](#) is intended to encourage students who are unsure about college to attend. “Being able to get that message that says, ‘Hey, you’re admitted, and you just need to submit some paperwork,’ I think it’s going to be a big boost for a lot of students,” Adrian Huerta, an associate professor and college access scholar at the USC Rossier School of Education, has said.

Gender-neutral bathrooms: All public schools in California [will be required to provide at least one all-gender bathroom starting July 1](#). The legislation expands a decade-old law that requires K-12 schools to allow students to use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity. [SB 760](#) was passed in 2023. “These measures will help protect vulnerable youth, promote acceptance and create more supportive environments in our schools and communities,” Newsom said in a statement when he signed the bill.

Cellphones in classrooms: Public schools are required to [adopt a policy by July 1 to prohibit or limit the use of smartphones by students](#) when they are on campus. [AB 3216](#) leaves it up to local K-12 schools whether students should be banned from using cellphones altogether. But the law requires public schools to restrict phone use in order to “support pupil learning and well-being.”

Immigration raids: Federal immigration agents are [barred from nonpublic areas of public schools](#) unless they have a judicial warrant or court order. Under [AB 49](#), school districts also are [prohibited from providing information](#) about pupils, their families, teachers and school employees to immigration authorities without a warrant. SB 98 also requires school administrators to notify families and students if federal agents conduct immigration operations on a K-12 or college campus.

Antisemitism: A state Office for Civil Rights will be created to [combat antisemitism and other forms of discrimination in California schools](#). [AB 715](#) was among the most hotly contested education-related measures, spawning from dissatisfaction, largely among a coalition of Jewish groups, with the way ethnic studies have been taught in some California classrooms. On Wednesday, a federal judge in San José rejected a lawsuit filed by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee on behalf of a group of educators and students, who challenged the law, clearing AB 715 to take effect.

Animals

Official snake: The giant garter snake is recognized as the official snake of California. Advocates [hope this recognition](#) from [SB 765](#) will raise awareness about the threatened species, which is found in the Central Valley and has experienced large-scale habitat destruction due to urban and agricultural development.

Paws need claws: Declawing a cat in California is now illegal unless the surgery is medically necessary. [AB 867](#) bans the procedure, which entails amputating the first bone in each of a feline’s toes or severing the tendons. Assemblymember Alex Lee (D-San José), the bill’s author, [previously called](#) the practice “barbaric” and inhumane.

Housing

Faster construction: Various infrastructure projects are now exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act’s lengthy review process. This reversal from AB 130 and SB 131 [has outraged environmentalists](#), who say it removes crucial protections for the state’s most vulnerable wildlife and communities. Proponents of the legislation argue construction must be faster and cheaper to address the state’s housing crisis.

Renter rights: Landlords must provide working stoves and refrigerators for tenants as part of new lease agreements. AB [628](#) also requires landlords to replace these items within 30 days if the manufacturers issue a recall. This expands on a previous law requiring buildings with dwelling units to maintain adequate heating and hot water.

A new California law requires tortillas to include an extra ingredient starting Jan. 1



Stacks of tortilla packages at a supermarket in Fresno in April.

(Larry Valenzuela / CalMatters–CatchLight Local)

By Ana B. Ibarra

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Tortillas sold in California are going to have a new ingredient, one that's intended to help nurture infants.

Starting Jan. 1, a new law will take effect requiring most tortillas and corn masa products sold in the state to contain folic acid, a vitamin that's important to infant health.

Latinas in California are [far less likely](#) than other women to get enough folic acid early in pregnancy — a gap that can lead to life-altering birth defects.

State data show that between 2017 and 2019 — the latest years for which state data is available — [about 28% of Latinas](#) reported taking folic acid the month before becoming pregnant. White women took the vitamin at a higher rate, with 46% of them reporting consuming folic acid, according to the California Department of Public Health.

This puts Latinas at higher risk of having a baby born with neural tube defects — defects of the brain and spinal cord. Some examples of that are conditions like [spina bifida](#) and [anencephaly](#).

Research has shown that folic acid can [reduce birth defects by up to 70%](#). That's why it's found in prenatal vitamins. But because women may not find out they are pregnant for weeks or months after, public health experts have long recommended that folic acid also be added to staple foods.

In 1998, the U.S. required manufacturers to fortify certain grain products with folic acid, such as pasta, rice, and cereals, to help women of reproductive age get the necessary amounts. Since that rule took effect, the rate of babies born with neural tube defects [dropped by about a third](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But even with the addition to these foods, birth defect rates among babies born to Latinas have been consistently higher. In search of a more culturally appropriate addition, in 2016, the federal government allowed makers of corn masa to add folic acid to their foods — but didn't require it. Joaquin Arambula, a Democrat from Fresno who authored the law, said leaving folic acid out of corn masa products, used in many Latino staple foods, was a “real oversight.”

Now, with the implementation of [Assembly Bill 1830](#), California is the first state to require folic acid in corn masa products. The law requires

manufacturers that do business in the state to add 0.7 milligrams of folic acid to every pound of flour and to list the addition in their nutrition labels. The law makes exemptions for small-batch producers like restaurants and markets that might make their own tortillas from scratch.

Months after California's law was signed, [Alabama passed its own version](#). Its law goes into effect in June.

Some large manufacturers have been adding folic acid to their products for years. Gruma, the parent company of Mission Foods, said it started fortifying its foods back in 2016, when the federal government first allowed it. A company spokesperson said Gruma "has a longstanding commitment to supporting legislative fortification initiatives" and supports the new laws in California and Alabama.

Ibarra writes for CalMatters.

Below from Newsom's website: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/12/31/new-in-2026-california-laws-taking-effect-in-the-new-year/>

Health

Alternative birth centers: licensing and Medi-Cal reimbursement

AB 55 (Bonta): Ensures that licensure of alternative birth centers is more accessible to midwives in California by amending or deleting onerous and unnecessary requirements.

State emergency food bank reserve program

AB 798 (Calderon): Expands the state emergency food bank program to include diapers and wipes for families with young children.

Midwifery Workforce Training Act

AB 836 (Stefani): Requires the Department of Health Care Access and Information to administer funding for a statewide midwifery education.

Capping insulin costs

SB 40 (Wahab and Wiener): Beginning January 1, 2026, large state-related health insurers must cap insulin copays at \$35 for a 20-day supply, improving affordability for Californians who rely on insulin.

Access to prenatal multivitamins

SB 646 (Weber-Pierson): Expands access to prenatal multivitamins to support healthy pregnancies and infant development.

Perinatal services in rural hospitals

SB 669 (McGuire): Requires, by July 1, 2026, the establishment of a 10-year pilot project within up to 5 critical access hospitals on an application basis to establish standby perinatal services.

Immigration

Students – know your rights

AB 419 (Connolly): Requires schools to post information about students' rights regarding immigration enforcement in administrative offices and on school websites, helping families understand that all children have the right to a free public education.

Family Preparedness Act

AB 495 (Rodriguez): Strengthens protections for parents and children by helping families in emergencies, protecting family privacy, and preventing child facilities from collecting immigration-related information, especially if a parent is detained or separated.