Fact Sheet: SB 1079

**Senator William Monning**

**Forestry Grants: Advanced Payment**

# 

#### Proposed Bill

Senate Bill (SB) 1079 authorizes the Director of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to allow advanced payments from the Forest Health Grant and Fire Prevention Fund Grant Programs.

#### Background

For years, CAL FIRE has approved grants to nonprofits for forest health and fire prevention programs, including to Fire Safe Councils. In doing so, CAL FIRE historically included grant application guidance and agreements that allowed for advanced payments rather than reimbursements.

CAL FIRE has recently reviewed its statutory authority and determined it lacks specific permission to advance payments of forest health and fire prevention grants awarded to nonprofits.

As a result, CAL FIRE has changed its policy to require nonprofits that have received forest health and fire prevention grants to be reimbursed. However, reimbursements typically take 60-90 days after submittal of support documentation to CAL FIRE. This delay creates both a project performance and financial hardship for many local nonprofit Fire Safe Councils, who generally apply for these forest health and fire prevention grants.

Many local Fire Safe Councils are located in small, rural areas of California where their cash reserve budgets are minimal and they do not have the cash flow to reimburse vendors and contractors, who now have to wait at least 60-90 days until CAL FIRE reimburses the local Councils. Even if a small business vendor or contractor is able to wait 60-90 days for payment, the nonprofit cannot submit a reimbursement until the vendor is actually paid. Meaningful projects that the grant program wants to achieve and nonprofits want to take on are not being done because of the current reimbursement process.

California is experiencing larger and more intense wildfires throughout the state. Due to drought and bark beetles, there are more than 29 million dead trees on 8.9 million acres. These dead trees pose a hazard to people and critical infrastructure. Even chaparral areas of California, areas without pine tree mortality, are experiencing extraordinarily severe fire conditions due to drought and longer fire seasons.

CAL FIRE is currently administering California Climate Investments grant funds, which consists of the Forest Health, Urban Forestry and Fire Prevention Grants. In 2017-18, up to $200 million is available from the Forest Health and Fire Prevention grants program to nonprofits, special districts and local agencies in order to proactively restore forest health, reduce wildfire impacts, and reduce state greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.

Fire Safe Councils and other nonprofits and special districts have been at the forefront in achieving the goals to restore forest health and reduce wildfire impacts, and are dependent on the availability of the advancement of grant funds. Unfortunately, the Councils and other nonprofits and special districts will not be able to apply for grant funds because they are unable to pay for the costs upfront and wait for reimbursement.

The result is that many dangerous public safety, wildfire, and unhealthy forestry conditions around the state will continue to go unaddressed.

In 2017, Assemblymember Gonzalez Fletcher authored Assembly Bill (AB) 1530 (Chapter 720, Statutes of 2017). AB 1530 allows for advance payments to nonprofits for urban forestry grants administered by CAL FIRE. SB 1079 is similar to AB 1530.

#### Solution

In order to reduce the incidence of wildfires, reduce losses and continue to remove dead trees, SB 1079 will allow CAL FIRE to advance payments to nonprofit organizations, special districts, and local agencies rather that use the current reimbursement process for forestry and fire prevention grants.

**Support**

City of Pismo Beach

El Dorado County Fire Safe Council

San Luis Obispo County Cattlemen’s

Association

San Luis Obispo County FireSafe Council

Sierra Springs Regional Fire Safe Council

**Opposition**

None at this time.

**For More Information**

Contact: Bethany Westfall

Phone: (916) 651-4017

Email: [Bethany.westfall@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Bethany.westfall@sen.ca.gov)