



August 13, 2026

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Speaker of the Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8330
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Monique Limón
President pro Tempore of the Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Wildfire Liability Reform – OPPOSE Provisions Limiting Local Government Recovery

Dear Governor Newsom, Speaker Rivas, and President pro Tempore Limón:

On behalf of the City of Upland, I write to oppose any wildfire liability reform proposal that limits the ability of local governments to fully recover emergency response costs, damage to public infrastructure and property, lost public revenues, and other costs resulting from a utility-caused wildfire.

Upland is acutely aware of the growing threat posed by catastrophic wildfires. Portions of the City are located in or near high and very high fire hazard severity zones and the wildland-urban interface. Our community includes hillside neighborhoods, critical evacuation routes, open-space areas, and essential public infrastructure that require significant local planning and investment to protect. The City devotes substantial resources to emergency preparedness, vegetation management, evacuation planning, public safety, mutual aid, and community resilience.

We recognize the importance of maintaining a stable Wildfire Fund, ensuring that wildfire survivors receive timely compensation, protecting ratepayers, and strengthening California's wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts. These objectives, however, should not be achieved by shifting costs away from utilities and their shareholders and onto local governments, taxpayers, wildfire survivors, and affected communities.

Cities are on the front lines when catastrophic wildfires occur. Local agencies do not wait for litigation or reimbursement decisions before responding. Cities deploy police, fire, public works, emergency management, and other personnel; coordinate evacuations; clear and reopen roads; restore water and sewer systems; repair damaged public facilities; maintain essential services; and support residents throughout the recovery and rebuilding process.



Damage to local infrastructure can extend well beyond what is immediately visible following a fire. Water and sewer systems, roads, communications equipment, public buildings, parks, and other essential facilities may all require significant repair or replacement. Limiting recovery to the depreciated value of a damaged asset, rather than the cost necessary to repair or replace it could leave local agencies with substantial unreimbursed costs. A community cannot meaningfully rebuild if the public infrastructure needed to support homes, businesses, and essential services remains damaged.

If local governments are prevented from recovering these costs from the utility responsible for the fire, the costs do not disappear. They are instead transferred to local taxpayers and already constrained municipal budgets, potentially forcing reductions to public safety, infrastructure maintenance, emergency preparedness, and other essential services.

Federal disaster assistance is not an adequate substitute for recovery of emergency response and mutual aid costs from a responsible utility. Federal Emergency Management Agency reimbursement can take years, may cover only a portion of eligible costs, and is not available following every emergency. Local governments should not be required to pursue, exhaust, or wait for federal or state disaster assistance before seeking recovery from a responsible utility.

We are also concerned about any proposal that would limit the recovery of property tax, sales tax, transient occupancy tax, or other public revenues lost following a catastrophic wildfire. These revenues fund the very public safety personnel, infrastructure, emergency operations, and community services most needed during recovery. Restricting their recovery would further destabilize affected communities at the time they are least able to absorb additional financial losses.

Accordingly, the City of Upland respectfully requests that any wildfire liability legislation:

- Preserve inverse condemnation and other existing legal remedies for utility-caused wildfires.
- Preserve the ability of cities and counties to fully recover emergency response, debris removal, infrastructure repair, public property, rebuilding, and long-term recovery costs.
- Preserve recovery for lost tax and other public revenues needed to maintain essential services.
- Avoid imposing caps, exclusions, reimbursement hierarchies, or heightened liability standards that disadvantage affected local governments.
- Avoid requiring local agencies to seek or exhaust FEMA or other disaster assistance before recovering costs from a responsible utility.
- Ensure that compliance with an approved wildfire mitigation plan does not provide a complete defense to negligence or otherwise eliminate accountability for unsafe utility operations.



City of Upland

Mayor's Office

- Strengthen utility oversight, system hardening, vegetation management, infrastructure maintenance, and enforcement for repeated safety violations.
- Ensure that wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts are coordinated with local governments and reflect local evacuation, infrastructure, land-use, and emergency-response conditions.

The City supports a comprehensive and transparent discussion about wildfire prevention, utility accountability, insurance availability, ratepayer affordability, and community resilience. Any reforms of this magnitude must be publicly vetted and developed with meaningful participation from cities, counties, wildfire survivors, and other affected stakeholders.

California should focus on preventing catastrophic wildfires, strengthening utility safety, and helping communities become more resilient. It should not require local taxpayers to absorb the costs when utility equipment causes a wildfire.

For these reasons, the City of Upland respectfully opposes any wildfire liability reform proposal that limits local-government recovery or shifts utility-caused wildfire costs onto affected communities.

Sincerely,

Bill Velto
Mayor, City of Upland

cc: Laura Varela, League of California Cities