

LEGAL UPDATES

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Industry

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Landlords, Take Note: California Sets Clear Appliance Rules for 2026 Leases

On October 6, 2025, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 628 (AB 628) into law, mandating that landlords provide a working stove and refrigerator in all rental units subject to new, amended, or renewed residential leases starting January 1, 2026. The new law amends Civil Code §1941.1 and redefines what constitutes a habitable rental unit, reclassifying stoves and refrigerators as necessities as opposed to mere amenities, or as Assemblymember Tina McKinnor—the key policymaker behind AB 628—said in a recent statement, “A working stove and a working refrigerator are not luxuries. They are a necessary part of modern life.”

Legal and business realities

While well intentioned, the new law does create complications for landlords with smaller operations and lower margins. In addition to the obvious financial implications resulting from mandated purchases and maintenance of appliances, smaller landlords will likely contend with an array of legal issues relating to the provision of appliances, some of which arise out of the statutory language itself. There is a lack of definition around some key concepts—including what constitutes a “working” model and who bears responsibility for tenant-caused malfunctions—that will likely only be resolved via litigation, which is itself an added potential expense for smaller landlords.

The bigger picture

California is currently suffering from a long and severe housing shortage crisis that has complex root causes, and no demographic has suffered more during the crisis than those at or near the poverty line. To the extent AB 628 affects residential property market participants, it is the renters and landlords at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale who will feel the impact, except that impact might not be what policymakers had in mind.

Taken on its own, AB 628 could be viewed as a minor consideration for California landlords, but the new law does not exist in a vacuum. It is the latest in a series of actions spanning many years where the state has steadily encroached upon the autonomy of private parties negotiating and entering into residential lease arrangements. Simply put, the state has sharply constrained what landlords and tenants can agree to, mostly to the disfavor of landlords, and AB 628 is very much in that vein. Exceptions exist but are limited, and the costs of implementation will fall mostly on landlords, given the extensive use of rent caps and controls at both the state and local level. These costs will have to be absorbed at a time during which we have seen rapid inflation in operating costs, particularly in the areas of insurance and maintenance. Some smaller operators may be unable or unwilling to absorb the upfront and ongoing costs and remove supply from the housing market, potentially worsening the housing crisis.

What this means to you

The enactment of AB 628 will require most landlords to provide stoves and refrigerators to tenants, creating new financial and legal burdens, particularly on smaller operators.

Contact us

If you have questions about how AB 628 will impact your business, contact Mhare Mouradian, MaryBeth Heydt, or your Husch Blackwell attorney.