



## **SB 1201 – Highway Beautification**

### *Senator Melissa Melendez*

#### **Background**

California’s highways are regularly ranked among the worst in the nation due, in part, to the homeless encampments along its highways and freeways. These populations have reportedly doubled since 2017. In addition, the Reason Foundation’s Annual Highway Report ranked California 45<sup>th</sup> in terms of highway conditions last year. Over the last decade, the best California ranked was 42<sup>nd</sup> in 2013. While these rankings reflect a myriad of factors, the presence of homeless encampments and the resulting damages to infrastructure remain “unacceptable” according to Governor Newsom.

Encampments along highways are not only unsightly, but also dangerous. In 2020, the San Diego Fire Department reported more than 1,000 fires linked to homeless encampments. In fact, this February a fire at a homeless encampment under an I-280 freeway onramp killed one woman and left three individuals in critical condition. With the number of homeless individuals in California continuing to increase, it is vital that efforts are made to address the danger that homeless encampments pose to both the individuals within them and the areas that surround them.

#### **Problem Being Addressed**

SB 1201 would allow local governments to use funding from the Clean California Grant Program of 2021 and the Clean California State Beautification Program of 2021 to address the prevalence of homeless encampments along California’s highways.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the prevalence and longevity of homeless encampments as the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) – the entity responsible for the maintenance of California’s highways and freeways – modified policies to limit the removal of “low-level” encampments in order to promote sheltering in place efforts. This has resulted in an epidemic of homeless encampments that requires more funding than previously allocated. By allowing local governments to utilize funding previously unavailable to this cause, SB 1201 would provide more desperately needed resources to the cleanup and safety of California’s highways.

#### **Which code section is affected?**

SB 1201 amends the Streets & Highways Code.

#### **Summary**

SB 1201 would allow local governments to use the Clean California Grant Program and Clean California State Beautification Program funding to clean up homeless encampments on or around highway right of ways.

#### **Staff Contact**

Jared Yoshiki – [Jared.Yoshiki@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Jared.Yoshiki@sen.ca.gov)

#### **Supporters**

Pending