



# California Senate Republican Caucus

Kelly Seyarto  
Caucus Chair  
Suzette Martinez Valladares  
Caucus Whip

Brian W. Jones, Senate Minority Leader

Marie Alvarado-Gil  
Steven S. Choi, Ph.D.  
Megan Dahle  
Shannon Grove  
Roger W. Niello  
Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh  
Tony Strickland

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Scott Wiener, Chair  
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 502  
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: Senate Republican Caucus Budget Priorities

Dear Chair Wiener,

Thank you for inviting senators to submit letters that address statewide budget priorities. We understand that this will be a challenging budget year. Nonetheless, we believe the priorities outlined below represent some of the issues that the budget should address to provide Californians with the safety and prosperity they deserve.

We share the belief with many majority party lawmakers that substantive policy changes should be made through the proper policy process—one that allows for transparency, public input, and thorough debate—rather than being buried within large budget trailer bills.

## Senate Republican Priorities

- 1. *Prevent Catastrophic Fires.*** The tragic wildfires in Southern California illustrate yet again that California needs to invest more in fire prevention through vegetation and forest management. After decades of neglect, the state of California began to improve on fire prevention in recent years, but even in the surplus years of 2021-22 and 2022-23, most of the fire prevention funds were short-term in nature. Better fire prevention policies improve residents' safety as well as air quality. Avoiding major wildfires would do more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions than many of the majority party's mandates, restrictions, and spending priorities. The state of California cannot meaningfully affect global emissions, but it can significantly reduce the risk of catastrophic fires by managing its own forest and urban interface acreage better.

The state should start by committing a minimum of \$3 billion annually toward fire prevention efforts, including forest and vegetation management. At least \$936 million for this purpose should come from redirecting Cap and Trade funds that would otherwise support High-Speed Rail in the Governor's budget. The construction phase of High-Speed Rail adds to greenhouse gas emissions, and since the project will never fully be built, High-Speed Rail will never actually reduce pollution. In contrast, preventing fires dramatically reduces pollution.

Fire prevention efforts should include keeping previously seasonal firefighters on the payroll year-round and using these staff to assist in prevention efforts. This request is a rough estimate of the annual resources needed to address the problem in a reasonable number of years. The state should also build on the recent work by the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force to develop a more precise estimate of the statewide need for prevention.

2. **Fully Fund Treatment and Enforcement Under Proposition 36.** Last November nearly 70 percent of California voters approved Proposition 36's treatment-focused approach to reduce crime by breaking cycles of addiction and lowering recidivism. The voter guide for the election included the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office's estimate that Proposition 36 would cost up to the low hundreds of millions of dollars annually to implement. Unfortunately, Governor Newsom did not propose any funding in his January budget for treatment. Senate Republicans call for \$400 million in annual funding to implement the expressed will of California voters.
3. **Reject Budget Cuts to Public Universities and Financial Aid.** The Governor's January budget confirmed the plan the majority party enacted in 2024 to cut funding for the University of California and the California State University by more than \$1.2 billion combined. The Governor's budget would also reduce funding for Middle Class Scholarships by nearly \$400 million. Senate Republicans call for rejection of these cuts. Funding for our universities also should be predicated on those systems fulfilling their mission to admit sufficient numbers of California students, not out-of-state applicants.
4. **Reduce Government-Imposed Unemployment Debt for Job Creators.** The state still holds a \$21 billion unemployment insurance debt following Governor Newsom's pandemic-related business shutdowns and the more recent increase in state unemployment. Job creators did not volunteer for this debt, but they began to bear the costs of repaying it beginning in 2023. Those costs will make it more difficult to create new jobs in California, which has the second-highest unemployment rate among states. Despite a nearly \$98 billion surplus in 2022-23, the state failed to pay off this obligation, even though 48 other states completely retired their unemployment debts. The state has paid over \$1 billion for interest on this debt from the General Fund since 2021, and the Governor's budget indicates the General Fund must pay another \$634 million for interest in 2025-26. Setting out a payment plan now to eliminate that debt over several years would not only eliminate those interest costs for the state, but also help all Californians by clearing the path for job creators to provide more employment opportunities.
5. **Improve Water Storage to Prepare for Fire Response and Rain Variability.** Senate Republicans have called for significant investments in water infrastructure for decades in order to prepare California for its cycle of droughts and rainy seasons. The Palisades fire also highlighted the importance of properly maintained reservoirs for fire response: a local reservoir sat frustratingly empty while fire helicopters searched for fresh water to douse the flames. Senate Republicans renew our call to better fund water storage through an investment of \$1 billion in bond funds and General Fund combined to construct projects that enhance water reliability and supply, safeguard communities, and protect property.

6. **Replace Federal Funds for Rural Schools and Counties.** For decades counties around the state that include rural areas have relied on federal funds through the Secure Rural Schools program to replace local government tax revenues that are displaced by federal land. Senate Republicans will advocate for the federal government to restore recent cuts to these funds, but in the near term the state can replace \$34 million in funds for this purpose. Potentially half this amount may be provided under Proposition 98.
7. **Care for Medically Fragile Children.** Pediatric day health centers are facilities that provide nursing care for severely disabled and medically fragile children while their parents work full-time jobs. Unfortunately, the state has underfunded these facilities. Senate Republicans call for \$4 million General Fund in 2025-26 and \$8 million annually to increase the Medi-Cal provider reimbursement rates to a sustainable level for these essential services.
8. **Provide Ongoing Funds to Combat Internet Crimes Against Children.** California has five regional task forces in which local, state and federal agencies join forces to investigate and prosecute crimes against children committed by offenders who use the internet, on-line communication systems, and other technologies to perpetrate their crimes. In recent years, state funding has been provided on a limited-term basis, leading to uncertainty about the future of the task forces. Senate Republicans support the Governor's budget proposal to provide \$5 million General Fund annually to fully and permanently fund the task forces.

**State Has Mismanaged Budget While Failing to Address Key Priorities.** During the Newsom administration, state General Fund spending has grown by nearly \$86 billion, or 60 percent. Part of that growth funds TK-14 education, as required by the state constitution, but even setting aside that requirement, the remainder of General Fund spending grew by \$55 billion or 62 percent. That astonishing growth occurred during a period when the state population remained flat.

Taxpayers should be concerned about mismanagement of the budget in recent years. Governor Newsom's administration just announced a \$3.4 billion loan was necessary to cover a shortfall in the Medi-Cal program. Another \$2.8 billion is reportedly needed as well through a supplemental appropriation.

Taxpayers also know that current state programs are often not totally effective nor efficient. In a recently published CalMatters op-ed, California's inaugural chief data officer, appointed by Governor Jerry Brown, offered this frank assessment: "But let's not kid ourselves: California's government is rife with waste. As a state data official, I saw firsthand how departmental silos obscure spending, how outdated systems hide inefficiencies, and how fraud festers in a budget so vast it defies comprehension."

If California manages its funds properly, there should be more than enough money to address the priorities outlined in this letter. Senate Republicans stand ready to help fix California and get our state out of the spiraling cycle of budget deficits projected for years to come.

It is, of course, up to you and your majority party colleagues if you want to move forward in a new, truly transparent and bipartisan approach to state budgeting. As we have continually stated, we look forward to working with you to address our issues.

We eagerly await your response.

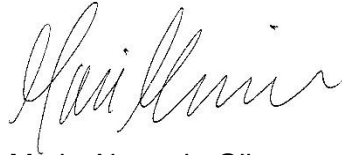
Sincerely,



Roger Niello  
Vice Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
Senate District 6



Brian Jones  
Senate Minority Leader  
Senate District 40



Marie Alvarado-Gil  
Senate District 4




Steven S. Choi, PhD  
Senate District 37



Megan Dahle  
Senate District 1



Shannon Grove  
Senate District 12



Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh  
Senate District 19



Kelly Seyarto  
Senate District 32



Tony Strickland  
Senate District 36



Suzette Martinez Valladares  
Senate District 23