

# Jerry Brown vetoes bill easing permits on cell phone towers

[Tracy Seipel](#) October 16, 2017 at 4:17 am



Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group

Gov. Jerry Brown late Sunday vetoed Senate Bill 649, which proposed to scale back local government permit processes for antennas and equipment for wireless services.

**SACRAMENTO** — A bill co-authored by a Bay Area assemblyman that would have blocked the ability of cities and counties to control the installation of microwave radiation antennas was vetoed just before midnight Sunday by Gov. Jerry Brown.

In a signing statement, Brown wrote: “There is something of real value in having a process that results in extending this innovative technology rapidly and efficiently.”

Nevertheless, he noted, “I believe the interest which localities have in

managing rights of way requires a more balanced solution than the one achieved in this bill.”

Brown served as the mayor of Oakland from 1999 to 2007.

Senate Bill 649, authored by Sen. Ben Hueso, D-San Diego and co-authored by Assemblyman Bill Quirk, D-Hayward, proposed to scale back permit processes for antennas and equipment in an effort to meet demand for wireless services.

The bill was primarily supported by the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, the main trade group for the U.S. wireless telecommunications industry. The group said SB 649 would help boost the economy.

Yet the bill had alarmed many local government officials around the state. They worried if SB 649 became law, it would cap how much they could charge phone companies for leases to \$250 a year. Activists, meanwhile, were concerned about the risk to public health from cell towers.

“I am thrilled that Governor Brown showed strength and stood up to this powerful wireless industry and said no — you are not going to do this in my state!” Ellen Marks, a San Francisco-based leader of the California Alliance for Safer Technology, wrote in an email after Brown’s decision was posted online.

“This is a tremendous victory for democracy,” said Marks, whose group is trying to keep cellular antennas away from homes, schools, offices and parks.

A CTIA spokeswoman said the bill maintained local authority for “small cell” antennas, particularly in historical or coastal areas, and that governments could recover capital and administrative costs.

But San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo was among several Bay Area leaders who voiced their opposition to the bill, and he did so again in an Oct. 3 opinion

piece published in the New York Times.

In it, Liccardo argued that if enacted into law, SB 649 would override local authority to set lease rates, supplant local jurisdiction rights to decide how to deploy telecommunications equipment over public areas, and wouldn't require those companies to expand broadband access to low-income neighborhoods.

Grass-roots activists and scientists said that if SB 649 became law, a projected 50,000 new cellular antennas would be installed on public buildings and utility poles in California neighborhoods, creating a risk to public health because of the dangers of radiation and electromagnetic frequencies emitted by cell towers.

Quirk and Hueso called that criticism by scientists of their legislation overblown, saying the cell towers are safe. Yet repeated calls this summer by the Bay Area News Group to the Washington, D.C.-based CTIA seeking comment on potential health concerns related to cellular antennas were never returned by any spokesperson.

At the time, Joel Moskowitz, director of the Center for Family and Community Health at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health, told the Bay Area News Group that the trade group habitually ducks publicly addressing the health risks of cell antennas.

The CTIA "never says it's safe because the industry will be in deep water when the lawsuits play out finally before a jury," said Moskowitz, who has studied and written about the issue for eight years.

In an email to the Bay Area News Group late Sunday, Moskowitz was heartened by Brown's veto, coming on the heels of a federal appeals court ruling last week that supports Berkeley's landmark cell phone "right to know" ordinance.

The city law, which took effect last year, requires retailers to warn cellphone customers that wearing their device next to the body could result in exposure to radio frequency radiation exceeding federal guidelines.

Cellphone retailers must either post the message or give a paper copy to people who buy or lease phones.

“The Governor’s veto of SB 649 protects Californians from exposure to millimeter radiation from as many as 50,000 new cell towers,” wrote Moskowitz.

He noted that more than 180 scientists and doctors have signed a declaration calling for a moratorium on the increase of cell antennas required for 5G deployment, “as we are concerned about the health effects including neurological impacts, infertility, and cancer.”



**Sponsored Content**

# What Business Owners Need to Know About Cybersecurity

By



We surveyed middle market leaders on the challenges surrounding cybersecurity. See what they said.