



LETICIA CASTILLO

58TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 1597: Notary Public: Service Fees

SUMMARY

This bill modernizes California's statutory fee cap for notarial acts by increasing the maximum allowable fee from \$15 to \$20, the first adjustment since 2016. The proposal aligns the fee structure with current economic conditions to maintain reliable access to essential notarial services across the state—particularly in underserved, rural, and high-cost markets where service availability is increasingly strained.

BACKGROUND & ISSUE

Acting as guardians of trust, Notaries are California's frontline safeguard against financial fraud and abuse, supporting critical transactions ranging from housing and healthcare to estate planning and business activities. However, the fee cap governing notarial services has remained unchanged since January 1, 2017, while the cost of living has increased over 33%. Accordingly, this bill would raise the amount notaries public may charge for some of their services to cover the increased cost of serving the public.

Key dynamics driving the need for modernization:

- **Cost Inflation:** Due to high inflation in the past 5 years, increases in transportation, insurance, office space, and education costs have outpaced the current \$15 cap.
- **Service Availability Declines:** Since 2017 California has lost more than 22,000 active notaries public, limiting access to notarial services in rural, low-income and high-travel regions.
- **Equity & Access Risks:** Seniors, individuals with disabilities, wildfire survivors, and low-mobility residents rely heavily on accessible notary services to complete essential documents. Service gaps disproportionately impact those least able to travel or navigate alternatives.
- **Essential Public Function:** Notarial services are required for critical legal, financial, housing, healthcare, and educational transactions. When notaries are unavailable or inaccessible, constituents face delays or denials in exercising basic rights and completing time-sensitive transactions.

Without updating the fee framework, California risks a continued shrinking of the notary network and compounding access challenges for businesses and individuals who depend on timely, reliable notarial services.

THE BILL

AB 1597 provides a targeted, minimalist update to the Government Code to:

- Increase the maximum fee for acknowledgments, jurats, oaths, and certified copies from \$15 to \$20 per signature/notarial act.
- Maintains that no fees may be charged for notarizing an application or a claim by a US military veteran for a pension, allotment, allowance, compensation, insurance, or any other veteran's benefit.
- Preserve competitive pricing flexibility—this bill adjusts only the statutory ceiling, not the market rate or pricing requirements. Notaries may waive their fees on a case-by-case basis at their discretion.

This modernization strengthens California's notarial infrastructure and expands the reliability of access for all constituents.

- Enhances Consumer Access
 - Supports Small Business Resilience
 - Reinforces Fraud Mitigation
 - Aligns Policy with Economic Reality
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SPONSOR

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