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California Wineries Poised for Expanded Event Hosting Under New Legislation

AB 720 awaits Governor Newsom’s signature, promising increased tourism and support for family-owned vineyards amid industry challenges.

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The California Legislature has passed Assembly Bill 720, a measure that will allow wineries to host a limited number of events at their estate vineyard properties, even if those properties are not the site of their bonded winery. The bill, authored by Assemblymember Chris Rogers, a Democrat from Santa Rosa, now awaits the signature

of Governor Gavin Newsom. If signed into law, AB 720 will mark a significant change for the state's nearly 6,200 bonded wineries, more than 90 percent of which are family owned.

The passage of AB 720 comes at a time when California's wine industry is facing tightening sales and increased competition from both domestic and international producers. Industry leaders say the new legislation will help wineries attract visitors by offering more authentic experiences in vineyard settings. Robert P. Koch, president and CEO of Wine Institute, said the bill gives wineries new tools to welcome guests and deepen connections between California wine, agriculture, and local communities.

Assemblymember Rogers emphasized the importance of the wine industry to his district and to California as a whole. He noted that demographic changes and global market shifts have put pressure on winemakers. "AB 720 removes barriers and costs harming winemakers while giving additional tools to attract customers," Rogers said.

Under current regulations, many wineries are restricted in their ability to host events at vineyard properties that are separate from their main production facilities. AB 720 would ease these restrictions, allowing for a limited number of events at estate vineyards. Supporters argue that this change will not only enhance the visitor experience but also create jobs and generate business for local contractors, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses in wine country communities.

Rachel Newman, senior vice president of marketing at Bonterra Organic Estates in Mendocino County, testified in support of the bill. She described how allowing events at estate vineyards enables consumers to connect with California wine and agriculture in a more meaningful way. "There is no advertisement or influencer campaign that can replicate the power of standing in a vineyard, touching the soil, tasting the wine and experiencing the story for yourself," Newman said.

The bill received broad bipartisan support in the Legislature and was backed by a coalition of regional and statewide organizations representing winegrowers and vintners from across California. These groups include Amador Wine Country, Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association, California Association of Winegrape Growers, El Dorado Wines, Family Winemakers of California, Livermore Valley Vintners and

Growers, Mendocino Winegrowers, Paso Robles Wine Country, Russian River Valley Winegrowers, San Luis Obispo Coast Wine Collective, Santa Barbara Vintners, Temecula Valley Winegrowers Association, Wine Road of Sonoma County, Winegrowers of Napa County and Wineries of Santa Clara Valley.

Industry advocates say this new flexibility is especially important as U.S. wine sales have slowed in recent years. They believe that engaging consumers through direct experiences is key to maintaining California's reputation as a global leader in sustainable and high-quality wine production.

Koch said that AB 720 reflects the legacy of innovation and stewardship that has defined California's wine industry for generations. He added that policies like this help ensure wineries can continue to create world-class wines and share them with visitors from around the world.

If Governor Newsom signs AB 720 into law, wineries across California could soon begin planning new types of events at their estate vineyards. Supporters hope these changes will boost tourism throughout wine country regions while strengthening ties between visitors and the state's agricultural heritage.