

Date of Hearing: March 11, 2025  
Consultant: Elizabeth Potter

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
Nick Schultz, Chair

AB 247 (Bryan) – As Amended March 5, 2025

**SUMMARY:** Requires incarcerated individual hand crew members, from county jails, to be paid an hourly wage of \$19 and to have the wage rate updated on an annual basis.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Provides that for time spent in the county jail, a term of four days will be deemed to have been served for every two days spent in actual custody. (Pen. Code, § 4019.)
- 2) Provides that a county jail inmate assigned to a conservation camp by a sheriff and who is eligible to earn day-for-day credits shall instead earn two-for-one credits. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subd. (a).)
- 3) Provides that a county jail inmate who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a state or county facility as an inmate firefighter or who is assigned to a county or state correctional institution as an inmate firefighter and who is eligible to earn day-for-day credits shall instead earn two-for-one credits. Application is limited to eligible inmates after October 1, 2011. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subd. (b).)
- 4) Allows county jail inmates who have successfully completed training for firefighter assignments to also receive a credit reduction from their term of confinement. Application is limited to eligible inmates after October 1, 2011. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subd. (d).)
- 5) Prohibits a person convicted of murder from accruing work-time or program credit reductions. (Pen. Code, § 2933.2.)
- 6) States CDCR shall have authority to award credits earned for good behavior and approved rehabilitative or educational achievements. (Cal. Const. Art. 1, § 32, subd. (b).)
- 7) Prohibits slavery and provides that involuntary servitude is prohibited except to punish crime. (Cal. Const., art. I, §6.)
- 8) Authorizes the Legislature to provide for minimum wages and for the general welfare of employees. (Cal. Const., art. XIV, § 1.)
- 9) Provides that CDCR shall require of every able-bodied incarcerated person as many hours of faithful labor in each day and every day during their term of imprisonment. (Pen. Code, § 2700.)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Author's Statement:** According to the author, “Incarcerated people who fight fires heroically step forward to protect communities statewide. They currently earn \$5 to \$10 per day. Crews typically work grueling 24-hour shifts – although this year’s Los Angeles fires saw many working double that. AB 247 will ensure that incarcerated people on the front line of fire disasters receive fair compensation for their invaluable service during devastating fires. This bill is a step forward in recognizing and compensating the essential work that incarcerated workers do for our state during unprecedented disasters.”
- 2) **Conservation (Fire) Camps:** According to CDCR’s website, “The primary mission of the Conservation (Fire) Camp Program is to support state, local and federal government agencies as they respond to emergencies including fires, floods, and other natural or disasters. Additionally, hand crews respond to rescue efforts in local parks or flood suppression.

“CDCR, in cooperation with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACFD), jointly operates 35 conservation camps, commonly known as fire camps, located in 25 counties across California. All camps are minimum-security facilities and staffed with correctional staff.”<sup>1</sup>

The conservation camp can be a vital part of a person’s rehabilitation. “Just as in every CDCR prison, every conservation camp offers rehabilitative and educational services, including substance abuse programs, religious programs, and GED and college courses.”<sup>2</sup>

The participants are volunteers and must have “minimum custody” status – i.e., the lowest classification for an incarcerated person based on behavior and following rules while in prison and when participating in rehabilitative programing. Additionally, minimum custody status notwithstanding, certain convictions automatically make a person ineligible for a conservation camp assignment.<sup>3</sup>

Persons are excluded from fire camp based on any of the following: a conviction requiring sex offender registration; a life sentence; a sentence for escape within the last 10 years; an arson conviction; a felony hold; validated active or inactive prison gang membership or

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<sup>1</sup> CDCR Conservation (Fire) Camp Program website: (<<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/>>) [as of Mar. 3, 2025]

<sup>2</sup> CDCR Conservation (Fire) Camp Program website: (<<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>>) [as of Mar. 3, 2025]

<sup>3</sup> CDCR Conservation (Fire) Camp Program website: (<<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>>) [as of Mar. 3, 2025]

association; a public interest case; current or prior convictions of murder, rape, or kidnap (violent felonies); or a pattern of excessive misconduct or disruption of the orderly operations of the institution.<sup>4</sup>

- 3) **Conservation Camp (Fire) Wages:** CDCR runs 35 conservation/fire camps in partnership with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Los Angeles County Fire Department. (DOM § 51130.3.) State law permits CDCR to establish a Conservation Camp Program and to promulgate rules and regulations for the government of and management of their affairs. (Pen Code, §S 6200 & 6204; DOM § 51130.1.) The purpose of the Correctional Conservation Camp Program is to promote the conservation of natural and human resources in cooperation with other state and local agencies in a joint operation. (*Ibid.*) Incarcerated workers may be assigned to perform public conservation projects including, but not limited to, forest fire protection and control, forest and watershed management, recreational area development, fish and game management, soil conservation, and forest watershed revegetation. (DOM § 51130.2.)

Incarcerated staff in the camps are assigned to one of five pay grades with a pay rate of \$1.45 to \$3.90 per day. (DOM § 51130.27.3.) When working as emergency firefighters during a wildfire, that pay is increased to \$1 per hour and is paid by the State Emergency Fund. (*Ibid.*) The specific rate per hour is established by CDCR:

<b>Fire Camp Pay Schedule<sup>5</sup></b>	
<b>Pay Grade</b>	<b>Rates</b>
Grade I  The majority of workers are assigned to this grade	\$1.45 per day
Grade II  Skilled and experienced workers and a selected number of in-camp workers are assigned to this grade	\$1.67 per day
Grade III  A limited number of skilled workers who have been given special assignments are included at this level	\$1.95 per day
Grade IV  Reserved for a very limited number of highly skilled journeyman level workers	\$2.56 per day

<sup>4</sup> CDCR Conservation (Fire) Camp Program website: (<[https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/fire\\_camp\\_expungement/](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/fire_camp_expungement/)>)

<sup>5</sup> Source: DOM § 51130.27.3., [Department Operations Manual \(DOM\) - Regulations and Policy](#), p. 382.

Grade V  Two positions in each camp are designated for this grade	\$3.90 per day
Emergency Fire Fighter	\$1.00 hourly

The pay period for fire camps is based on the calendar month and incarcerated workers are compensated for each day’s work within the month. (DOM § 51130.27.2.) The standard workweek is five eight-hour days, Monday through Friday, with Saturdays, Sundays, and approved holidays off. (DOM § 51130.27.2.)

According to CDCR’s website, “depending on skill level, conservation camp incarcerated fire crew members earn between \$5.80 and \$10.24 per day, paid by CDCR. While assigned to an active emergency, incarcerated fire crew members earn an additional \$1 per hour paid by CAL FIRE, regardless of skill level. During emergencies, crews can work a 24-hour shift, followed by 24 hours of rest. For example, for one 24 hour shift during an active emergency, the lowest skill level would earn \$29.80 per day. They are paid during rest periods, as well.” Each camp has an in-camp pay committee. (DOM § 51130.27.1.) The committee determines the promotion and/or demotion of inmates in the various pay grades. (*Ibid.*)

While the information above applies to volunteers in CDCR, it provides a framework for how much these individuals are paid. This bill seeks to pay incarcerated individual hand crew members a minimum wage of \$19 per hour, which would subsequently be updated on annual basis. As written, this legislation is only applicable to incarcerated individual hand crew members that come from county jails.

- 4) **California Firefighter Wages:** California firefighter wages vary throughout the state. Some agencies, like the Los Angeles Fire Department, begin trainees (Firefighter I) at \$85,351 and include medical and dental benefits during their probationary period.<sup>6</sup> CalFIRE, one of California’s oldest agencies, states that a Firefighter I at CalFire pays Monthly Base salary of \$3,672.00 - \$4,643.00 Plus \$1,824 - \$2,306 Extended Duty Week Compensation (paid every 4 weeks). Firefighter I is a seasonal, temporary classification.<sup>7</sup> Comparatively, a volunteer firefighter in the Long Valley Fire Protection District in Mono County received a wage of \$2,308 dollars for their service.

As California wild fire season grows annually and more intensely, the work that hand crews provide is invaluable. Given the continuous and dangerous work that incarcerated individual hand crew members provide for the State of California, paying these individuals a comparable hourly wage, recognizes the work they do in combatting California wildfires.

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<sup>6</sup> Los Angeles Fire Department: <<https://www.joinlafd.org/salary-and-benefits>>

<sup>7</sup> CalFIRE website: <<https://www.fire.ca.gov/join-calfire/seasonal-firefighter>>

- 5) **Argument in Support:** According to *Initiate Justice*, a cosponsor of this bill, “We believe this legislation strikes at the heart of the many injustices facing incarcerated firefighters, who demonstrate the same level of bravery, sacrifice, and commitment to protecting our communities as non-incarcerated firefighters, yet face extreme disparities in pay.

“Initiate Justice fights to end mass incarceration by activating the political power of those directly impacted by it. Reaching over 60,000 people currently incarcerated in California’s state prisons and training hundreds of advocates inside and outside of our prisons, we advocate for policy change that centers the lived experiences of those most affected by incarceration. Incarcerated people are too often seen as disposable, and are not recognized for their positive contributions to our communities.

“The state of California has relied on incarcerated labor since its inception, and specifically for fire response for nearly 100 years. Known as the Conservation Camp Program, it is a program jointly run by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). During the height of the program, prior to many of the policy reforms enacted by the Legislature towards reducing the state prison population, as many as a third of all CAL FIRE firefighters were incarcerated.

“Incarcerated firefighters normally work on what are known as ‘hand crews’ conducting the grueling work of charting paths to slow the spread of fires using hand tools such as chainsaws, axes, and shovels. They are tasked with cutting down fire lines and removing “fuel” (i.e. debris like dead branches and leaves) from close to structures. During active deployments, incarcerated hand crews are often working 24-hour shifts right alongside non-incarcerated firefighters.

“While the prison population - including the population of people in fire camps and houses - has reduced in recent years as a result of positive reforms, incarcerated firefighters continue to play a vital role in our state’s response to these emergencies. Indeed, as Los Angeles County faced the most destructive wildfires in its history in January 2025, over 1,100 of the firefighters deployed to assist the city and county in its response were incarcerated.

“Despite the enormity of our state’s reliance on these firefighters, people in prison who are fire crew members are paid as little as \$5.80 per day by CDCR, and receive a shamefully low additional \$1 per hour, paid by CAL FIRE, during their active deployment. By increasing their pay to equal what the lowest paid non-incarcerated firefighter receives during active deployment, AB 247 takes a strong step towards ending the exploitative pay inequities that exist.

“Our incarcerated firefighters deserve dignity in pay for their relentless work in safeguarding our lives, communities, and properties.” (citations omitted)

- 6) **Argument in Opposition:** The *California State Sheriff’s Association* states, “Under existing law, any inmate who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a state or county facility as an inmate firefighter or who is assigned to a county or state correctional institution as an inmate firefighter shall earn two days of credit for every one day served in that assignment or after completing that training.

“We recognize the contribution made by inmate firefighters and in return for their service, these inmates earn very generous early release credits that reduce their sentences. Every day served in this role earns two additional days of credit, meaning an inmate would only serve one-third of their sentence for the time they qualify.

“AB 247 could also create significant fiscal pressure on counties already facing challenging budget times. Counties, if they are to be responsible for paying this new wage, would be forced to consider a substantial new cost when determining if and how to deploy inmate firefighters.”

- 7) **Related Legislation:** AB 248 (Bryan), would allow the Board of Supervisors in their respective counties, to credit a prisoner who is confined in or committed in a county jail performs a work assignment with a wage.
- 8) **Prior Legislation:** AB 2147 (Reyes), Chapter 60, Statutes of 2020, allowed a defendant who successfully participated in the California Conservation Camp Program (Fire Camp) or a county inmate hand crew to petition for a dismissal of their conviction.

## REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

### Support

Initiate Justice (Co-Sponsor)  
 Initiate Justice Action (Co-Sponsor)  
 A New Way of Life Re-entry Project  
 ACLU California Action  
 All of Us or None Los Angeles  
 Alliance for Boys and Men of Color  
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California  
 California Attorneys for Criminal Justice  
 California Coalition for Women Prisoners  
 California for Safety and Justice  
 California Immigrant Policy Center  
 California Innocence Coalition  
 California Public Defenders Association (CPDA)  
 Californians United for A Responsible Budget  
 Catalyst California  
 Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice  
 Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ)  
 Courage California  
 Debt Free Justice California  
 Democratic Party of The San Fernando Valley  
 East Bay Community Law Center  
 Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
 End Poverty in California Action Aka Epic Action, a Project of Tides Advocacy

Essie Justice Group  
Fresh Lifelines for Youth  
Friends Committee on Legislation of California  
Grip Training Institute  
Justice2jobs Coalition  
LA Defensa  
Land Together  
League of Women Voters of California  
Legal Services for Prisoners With Children  
Local 148 LA County Public Defenders Union  
Los Angeles County Democratic Party  
Nextgen California  
One Fair Wage  
Root and Rebound Reentry Advocates  
Rubicon Programs  
Ryse Center  
San Francisco Public Defender  
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition  
Smart Justice California, a Project of Tides Advocacy  
The W. Haywood Burns Institute  
University of San Francisco School of Law | Racial Justice Clinic  
Vera Institute of Justice  
Western Center on Law & Poverty, INC.

**Oppose**

California State Sheriffs' Association

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