
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 247 **Hearing Date:** July 8, 2025
Author: Bryan
Version: June 27, 2025
Urgency: Yes **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: SJ

Subject: *Incarcerated individual hand crew members: wages*

HISTORY

Source: Anti-Recidivism Coalition
Initiate Justice
Initiate Justice Action
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

Prior Legislation: AB 2147 (Reyes), Ch. 60, Stats. of 2020

Support: ACLU California Action; California Attorneys for Criminal Justice; California Public Defenders Association; California Youth Defender Center; Center for Employment Opportunities; Courage California; Debt Free Justice California; Ella Baker Center for Human Rights; Justice2Jobs Coalition; La Defensa; League of Women Voters of California; Michelson Center for Public Policy; Prosecutors Alliance of California; Rubicon Programs; San Francisco Public Defender; Smart Justice California; The W. Haywood Burns Institute; University of San Francisco School of Law, Racial Justice Clinic; Vera Institute of Justice

Opposition: California State Sheriffs' Association

Assembly Floor Vote: 74 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to require that individual hand crew members incarcerated in a state prison or county jail, or a ward placed at Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp, be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident, and require that the wage rate be updated annually.

Existing law prohibits slavery and provides that involuntary servitude is prohibited except to punish crime. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 6.)

Existing law authorizes the Secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to award credits earned for good behavior and approved rehabilitative or educational achievements. (Cal. Const., art. 1, § 32, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that CDCR require every able-bodied incarcerated individual imprisoned in any state prison as many hours of faithful labor in each day and every day during the person's

term of imprisonment as is prescribed by the rules and regulations of the Secretary. (Pen. Code, § 2700.)

Existing law provides, notwithstanding any other law, that any incarcerated person who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a correctional institution as an incarcerated firefighter or who is assigned to a correctional institution as an incarcerated firefighter shall earn two days of credit for every one day served in that assignment or after completing that training. (Pen. Code, § 2933.3, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that one day be deducted for each four-day period in which a person is confined in or committed to a jail facility, except as specified. (Pen. Code, § 4019, subds. (b) & (c).)

Existing law provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that if all days are earned under the credit earning provisions for 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, subd. (f).)

Existing law provides, notwithstanding any other law, that any person sentenced to county jail assigned to a conservation camp by a sheriff shall earn two days of credit for every one day of service. an incarcerated person who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a state or county facility as an incarcerated firefighter or who is assigned to a county or state correctional institution as an incarcerated firefighter shall earn two days of credit for every one day served in that assignment or after completing that training. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subds. (a) & (b).)

Existing law provides that incarcerated individuals who have successfully completed training for firefighter assignments shall receive a credit reduction from his or her term of confinement in addition to the other credits granted. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subd. (c).)

Existing law specifies that the above outlined credit earning only applies to individuals who are eligible after October 1, 2011. (Pen. Code, § 4019.2, subd. (d).)

Existing law authorizes CDCR to enter into contracts with counties to furnish training and rehabilitation programs, and necessary services, at Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp for persons 18 years of age and older who are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and the supervision of a county probation department following adjudication for a felony. (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 1760.45, subd. (a).)

This bill provides that individual hand crew members incarcerated in a state prison or county jail be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident. Requires the wage rate to be updated annually.

This bill provides that a ward or youth placed at the Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident. Requires that the wage rate to be updated annually.

This bill contains an urgency clause.

COMMENTS

1. Need For This Bill

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) Camp Program

CDCR, in cooperation with Cal Fire and the Los Angeles County Fire Department, jointly operates 35 conservation camps, commonly referred to as fire camps, in 25 counties across the state. Conservation Camp Program participants support state, local and federal government agencies as they respond to emergencies such as fires, floods, and other natural or manmade disasters, and complete community service projects when not assigned to an emergency. All fire camps are minimum-security facilities which are overseen by CDCR employees. Participants are supervised by Cal Fire staff when responding to a wildfire or working on a conservation project. (See <<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>>.)

Incarcerated individuals participating in fire camps receive the same entry-level training as Cal Fire’s seasonal firefighters as well as ongoing training from Cal Fire throughout their time in the program. An incarcerated person must volunteer for the fire camp program, and some individuals are ineligible for fire camp assignment based on their convictions, including convictions for sex offenses, arson, and escape with force or violence. (<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>.)

Individuals who volunteer for fire camp must complete Cal Fire’s Firefighting Training Program, and program participants become certified wildland firefighters after completing this training. (<<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>>)

3. Conservation Camp (Fire) Wages

Under existing law, an incarcerated person who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a correctional institution as an incarcerated firefighter or who is assigned to a correctional institution as an incarcerated firefighter earns two days of credit for every one day served in that assignment or after completing that training. (Pen. Code, § 2933.3, subd. (b).) In addition, incarcerated hand crew members housed at one of the state’s fire camps are compensated for each day’s work within the month. (CDCR Department Operations Manual (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.) The current compensation is \$5.80 and \$10.24 per day based on skill level and position.

(<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>) These individuals earn an additional \$1 per hour while assigned to an active emergency. During active emergencies, individual hand crews generally work a 24-hour shift, followed by 24-hour rest period, and are paid during rest periods. (*Id.*)

This bill increases the wages of the participants to \$7.25 per hour while actively fighting a fire, and requires that the hourly wage be updated annually.

4. County Conservation Programs

Under Penal Code section 4019.2, individuals incarcerated in a county jail may similarly earn credits for participation in a sheriff's conservation camp or successful completion of training for assignment to a conservation camp as an incarcerated firefighter. These individuals are eligible to earn two days of credit for every one day served.

This bill applies to individuals incarcerated in county jail as well as to wards with a placement at Pine Grove Conservation Camp, and requires that individual hand crew members are paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident.

5. Argument in Support

The W. Haywood Burns Institute writes:

... AB 247 ... would increase the hourly pay for incarcerated hand crews during active deployment. This legislation addresses a longstanding and deeply unjust disparity: incarcerated firefighters perform the same high-risk, physically demanding work as their non-incarcerated counterparts, yet receive only a fraction of the compensation.

...

California has relied on incarcerated labor for firefighting for nearly a century... At the height of the program, as many as one-third of CAL FIRE's frontline workforce was made up of incarcerated individuals.

...

Even as California's prison population has decreased in recent years due to positive and necessary criminal justice reforms, incarcerated firefighters continue to be a vital part of our state's emergency response infrastructure. As recently as January 2025, during Los Angeles County's most destructive wildfire season, more than 1,100 incarcerated individuals were deployed as first responders.

Despite this essential role, incarcerated firefighters are currently paid as little as \$5.80 per day by CDCR, with just \$1 per hour added during active deployments by CAL FIRE. AB 247 would raise that hourly pay to at least \$7.25 ... and provide for annual adjustments. This change is a small but powerful step toward recognizing the humanity and labor of incarcerated people and correcting the structural inequities that have persisted for far too long.

6. Argument in Opposition

According to the California State Sheriffs' Association:

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.

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