
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 952 **Hearing Date:** June 10, 2025
Author: Elhawary
Version: February 20, 2025
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: SJ

Subject: *Youth Offender Program Camp Pilot Program*

HISTORY

Source: Initiate Justice Action

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

Support: ACLU California Action; California Public Defenders Association; Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice; Courage California; Ella Baker Center for Human Rights; Friends Committee on Legislation of California; Initiate Justice; Initiate Justice Action; Justice2Jobs Coalition; La Defensa; Prosecutors Alliance of California; Smart Justice California; The W. Haywood Burns Institute; Vera Institute of Justice

Opposition: None known

Assembly Floor Vote: 76 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to require the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to make the Youth Offender Program Camp Pilot Program permanent, and authorize the Secretary of the department to expand the program to include some or all of California Conservation Camps.

Existing law establishes CDCR and the state's prisons. (Gov. Code, § 12383, subd. (a); Pen. Code, §§ 5000, 5003.)

Existing law establishes the California Conservation Camp program to provide for the training and use of incarcerated individuals and wards assigned to the camps to perform public conservation projects. (Pub. Resources Code, § 4951.)

Existing law defines "California Conservation Camps" or "camps" as "any camps now or hereafter established, as provided by law, for the purpose of receiving prisoners committed to the custody of the Director of Corrections and wards committed to the Director of the Youth Authority, and in which the work projects performed by the inmates or wards are supervised by employees of the department." (Pub. Resources Code, § 4952.)

This bill states that it is the intent of the Legislature to make the Youth Offender Program Camp Pilot Program within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation permanent.

This bill requires the Secretary of CDCR to make permanent the Youth Offender Program Camp Pilot Program. Authorizes, at the discretion of the secretary, expansion of the program to include some or all of California Conservation Camps.

This bill provides that “California Conservation Camps” has the same meaning as in Section 4952 of the Public Resources Code.

This bill includes legislative findings and declarations.

COMMENTS

1. Need For This Bill

According to the author:

AB 952 will make the Youth Offender Camp Pilot Program permanent. This will help reduce recidivism rates and provide a sustainable pathway for young people to participate in this successful program.

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. Youth Offender Program (YOP) Camp Pilot Program

The two-year YOP Camp Pilot Program was established in August 2023 at the Growlersburg Conservation Camp in Georgetown. The pilot program is intended to expand access to camp

programs to individuals 25 years old and younger, and those programs are designed to help participants develop job skills and lead to self-improvement.

Camp participants receive wildland firefighter training as well as educational and rehabilitative programming. The program provides additional hand crew members for emergency response to fires, floods, and other disasters in the state.

YOP candidates are required to be between 18-25 years old and possess either a high school diploma, GED, or have enough time left to serve to obtain a degree at camp. The pilot program allows some individuals to participate who are currently ineligible for the conservation camp program on a case-by-case basis. Applicants who have been convicted of rape, lewd acts with a child under 14, a felony punishable by death or imprisonment for life, a sex offense requiring sex offender registration, escape within the previous 10 years, or arson are automatically disqualified.

The pilot program initially had 17 participants, and following its success at the Growlersburg Conservation Camp, the pilot program expanded to Pine Grove Conservation Camp. Throughout its first year, the pilot program maintained two full YOP crews and ensured Growlersburg operated with five fully staffed crews.

The pilot program is set to expire later this year. This bill makes the YOP pilot program permanent and authorizes its expansion.

4. Argument in Support

Smart Justice writes:

Incarcerated hand crews play a vital role in our state's response to wildfire emergencies. For many years, incarcerated people with higher security classifications were categorically ineligible for conservation camps, as were young people under the age of 25. In 2023, CDCR established a pilot program at the Growlersburg Conservation Camp allowing, for the first time, young people between the ages of 18-25 with Level III security classifications to qualify for fire camp. The program was successful, and in 2024 CDCR expanded the program to the Pine Grove Camp.

Fire camp programs have been repeatedly shown to foster positive rehabilitation and to significantly lower recidivism rates, especially for people who spend 1 year or longer in the program. According to recent data from CDCR, recidivism rates for fire camp participants are as much as 14.5 percentage points lower than for the general incarcerated population.

By making the Youth Offender Conservation Camp initiative permanent, it provides a sustainable pathway for young people to participate in this successful program. AB 952 also gives the Secretary of CDCR discretion to expand the program to all 35 existing conservation camps or future ones.

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