
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1012 **Hearing Date:** April 14, 2026
Author: Smallwood-Cuevas
Version: March 24, 2026
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: SJ

Subject: *Employment of inmates*

HISTORY

Source: Laborers' International Union of North America, California State Council of Laborers; NextGen Policy

Prior Legislation: SB 245 (Reyes), Ch. 746, Stats. of 2025
SB 75 (Smallwood-Cuevas), vetoed, 2025
SB 423 (Smallwood-Cuevas), amended into another bill, 2025
AB 1380 (Elhawary), held in Senate Appropriations, 2025
AB 2147 (Reyes), Ch. 60, Stats. of 2020
SB 866 (Com. on Budget & Fiscal Review), Ch. 53, Stats. of 2018
SB 825 (Beall), died in Assembly Public Safety Committee, 2018
AB 2129 (Jones-Sawyer), held in Assembly Appropriations, 2014
AB 2060 (V. Manuel Perez), Ch. 383, Stats. of 2014

Support: California Public Defenders Association

Opposition: None known

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to 1) require the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program's joint advisory committee, in consultation with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), and the fire camp program, to facilitate the post-release admission of program graduates into any relevant state-approved apprenticeship and require state-approved apprenticeship programs to evaluate these individuals for admission with advanced standing; 2) require that successful completion of the fire camp program constitutes a qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship; and 3) require CDCR, in partnership with Cal Fire and the fire camp program, to ensure that all individuals who complete the fire camp program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience to ensure eligibility for state-approved apprenticeship programs.

Existing law establishes the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB), under the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, as the body responsible for assisting the Governor in the development, oversight, and continuous improvement of California's workforce system,

including its alignment to the needs of the economy and the workforce. (Unemp. Ins. Code, § 14010 et seq.)

Existing law establishes the Prison to Employment program, administered by CWDB, to coordinate reentry and workforce services in each of the state's 14 workforce regions so that the formerly incarcerated and other justice-involved individuals in these regions can find and retain employment. (Unemp. Ins. Code, §§ 14040-14042.)

Existing law requires the Secretary of CDCR to appoint a Superintendent of Correctional Education, who oversees and administers all prison education programs. Requires the Superintendent to set both short- and long-term goals for literacy and testing and career technical education programs, and to establish priorities for prison academic and career technical education programs. (Pen. Code § 2053.4.)

Existing law requires a career technical education program consider all of the following factors, consistent with the goals and priorities of CDCR:

- Whether the program aligns with the workforce needs of high-demand sectors of the state and regional economies;
- Whether there is an active job market for the skills being developed where the incarcerated person will likely be released;
- Whether the program increases the number of incarcerated individuals who obtain a marketable and industry or apprenticeship board-recognized certification, credential, or degree;
- Whether there are formal or informal networks in the field that support finding employment upon release from prison; and,
- Whether the program will lead to employment in occupations with a livable wage. (Pen. Code § 2053.5.)

Existing law establishes the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program administered by CDCR to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for incarcerated individuals upon release. (Pen. Code, § 2716.5, subd. (a).)

Existing law requires CDCR to establish a joint advisory committee for the purpose of implementation of the program. Requires the committee to be composed of representatives from building and construction trades employee organizations, the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, joint apprenticeship training programs, the California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority, the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS), the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and any other representatives the department determines appropriate. (Pen. Code, § 2716.5, subd. (b).)

Existing law provides that the committee has the following responsibilities:

- Develop guidelines for the participation of inmates in preapprenticeship training programs. Requires the guidelines to provide for the integration, for all preapprenticeship training programs in the building and construction trades, of the multicraft core curriculum (MC3) implemented by the State Department of Education (CDE) for its California Partnership Academies pilot project and by the CWDB and local boards.

- Develop and implement a prerelease construction trades certification that validates that an incarcerated person completed instruction, skills, and competencies required by and recognized by the participating building and construction trades.
- Ensure compliance with any applicable requirements and regulations DAS.
- Evaluate prerelease on-the-job training opportunities to compare and match competencies with those of registered apprentices in the building and construction trades.
- Explore the feasibility of the electronic tracking of each participating person's relevant activities to efficiently capture competencies related to the certification.
- Explore the prerelease awarding of formal credit for apprenticeship hours recognized by joint apprenticeship training programs and the DAS.
- Facilitate the admission of graduates of preapprenticeship programs for incarcerated individuals, after release, into state-approved apprenticeship programs and for apprenticeship programs to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.
(Pen. Code, § 2716.5, subd. (b).)

Existing law requires CWDB and each local workforce development board to ensure, to the maximum extent feasible, that federal respectively awarded by them for purposes of preapprenticeship training in the building and construction trades fund programs and services follow the MC3 implemented by CDE for its pilot project with California Partnership Academies. (Umemp. Ins. Code, § 14230, subd. (e)(2).)

Existing law establishes the Prison Industry Authority (Cal PIA) within CDCR, and describes Cal PIA's purposes as:

- Developing and operating industrial, agricultural, and service enterprises employing individuals incarcerated in the state's prisons.
- Creating and maintaining working conditions within the enterprises as much like those which prevail in private industry as possible, to ensure incarcerated individuals the opportunity to work productively, to earn funds, and to acquire or improve effective work habits and occupational skills.
- Operating a work program for incarcerated individuals that will be self-supporting by generating sufficient funds from the sale of products and services to pay all the expenses of the program, and one that will provide goods and services that are or will be used by CDCR. (Pen. Code, §§ 2800, 2801.)

This bill amends the joint advisory committee's responsibility to facilitate the post-release admission of graduates of preapprenticeship programs for incarcerated individuals into state-approved apprenticeship programs, to include graduates of the fire camp program.

This bill requires the joint advisory committee, in consultation with CDCR, Cal Fire, DIR, and the fire camp program, to facilitate the admission of graduates of the program, after release, into any relevant state-approved apprenticeship and for state-approved apprenticeship programs, including those in general construction and heavy equipment operations, to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.

This bill requires that successful completion of fire camp programs, including, but not limited to, wildland firefighter training, such as environmental remediation and forestry management, emergency response, and hazardous waste cleanup, constitute qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship under the DAS.

This bill requires CDCR, in partnership with Cal Fire and the fire camp program, to ensure that all individuals who complete the program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience to ensure eligibility for state-approved apprenticeship programs.

COMMENTS

1. Need For This Bill

According to the author:

SB 1012 recognizes the tremendous skill and sacrifice of incarcerated individuals who serve in the California Conservation Fire Camp program by ensuring they have access to equitable pathways that lead to real opportunities upon release. For too long, the state has relied on incarcerated fire camp participants while offering limited opportunities for stable employment once they return home.

SB 1012 expands the state's commitment to fire camp participants by ensuring they receive the support needed to continue serving California after their time has been served. In doing so, this bill helps address critical public safety workforce needs, reduces recidivism, and creates pathways to meaningful careers.

2. Pre-Apprenticeships

The Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) within the Department of Industrial Relations administers the state's apprenticeship laws and enforces apprenticeship standards for wages, hours, working conditions, and the specific skills required for state certification as a journey person in an apprenticeable occupation. In general, apprenticeship programs provide instruction that combines a formal course of in-class instruction with practical "on-the-job" training.

Pre-apprenticeship programs are designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in registered apprenticeship programs. These programs have a documented partnership with at least one registered apprenticeship program sponsor and together, they expand the participant's career pathway opportunities with industry-based training coupled with classroom instruction.

The Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) is a pre-apprenticeship training program that was developed in 2007 by North America's Building Trades Union. It was designed to identify common elements in all building and construction trades' apprenticeship programs and combine them into one curriculum encompassing 120 hours of training. Among other things, the curriculum includes general orientation to apprenticeships, an introduction to the construction industry, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid, an Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification course, applied mathematics for construction, and blueprint reading.

3. In-Prison Job Training Programs

Many studies have examined the relationship between employment and recidivism. Although the formerly incarcerated face many barriers to obtaining employment, good quality employment is correlated with lower rates of recidivism.¹ Given this correlation, California has invested in various types of in-prison job training programs in order to improve job prospects for the incarcerated population upon release.

In 2018, the Legislature established the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certification Program, administered by CDCR, to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for incarcerated individuals after release. The program is overseen by a joint advisory committee, composed of representatives from building and construction trades employee organizations, the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, joint apprenticeship training programs, Cal PIA, the DAS, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and any other representatives the department determines appropriate. The joint advisory committee's responsibilities include:

- Developing guidelines for the participation of incarcerated individuals in preapprenticeship training programs.
- Developing and implementing a pre-release construction trades certification that validates that an incarcerated person completed instruction, skills, and competencies required by and recognized by the participating building and construction trades.
- Ensuring compliance with any applicable requirements and regulations of the DAS.
- Evaluating pre-release on-the-job training opportunities to compare and match competencies with those of registered apprentices in the building and construction trades.
- Exploring the feasibility of the electronic tracking of each participating incarcerated individual's relevant activities to efficiently capture competencies related to the certification.
- Exploring the pre-release awarding of formal credit for apprenticeship hours recognized by joint apprenticeship training programs and the DAS.
- Facilitating the admission of graduates of preapprenticeship programs for incarcerated individuals, after release, into state-approved apprenticeship programs and for apprenticeship programs to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.

4. 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. Fire camp 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.²

¹ Connell, C., et al. *Effectiveness of interventions to improve employment for people released from prison: systematic review and meta-analysis*, Health Justice 11, 17 (2023) available at <<https://www.healthandjusticejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40352-023-00217-w#:~:text=Employment%20is%20associated%20with%20a,Sampson%20%26%20Laub%2C%201993>>.

² 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.³ 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.⁴

5. Reentry Programs

The State has also invested in reentry work training programs. As part of California’s efforts to increase rehabilitative opportunities and reduce recidivism, CWDB, CDCR, Cal PIA, and California Workforce Association created the Corrections-Workforce Partnership in 2017. This partnership links education, job training, and work experience in prison to post-release jobs by fostering a system of coordinated service delivery to a population that faces a variety of barriers.

In 2018, the Legislature appropriated \$37 million for the Prison to Employment Initiative (P2E), which is administered by the CWDB. The mission of P2E is to create a pathway toward employment and away from recidivism for formerly incarcerated and justice-involved individuals.⁵ P2E funds the integration of workforce and reentry services through grants to workforce service providers across California, including both “direct services” and “supportive services,” paving a pathway towards employment and away from recidivism for the formerly incarcerated and justice-involved population.⁶

CDWB’s interim report evaluating the P2E program outlines the types of direct services participants receive such as interview coaching and tuition for MC3 training in the construction trades.⁷ Additionally, supportive services help participants meet their basic needs, including stipends to cover participants’ transportation, clothing, and food costs.⁸ As of June 2021, P2E funds have been used to serve over 3,190 formerly-incarcerated and justice-involved individuals statewide.⁹ In January 2023, CWDB announced \$19 million in awards to new projects (P2E 2.0).¹⁰ The grant term for P2E 2.0 runs from January 2023 through December 2025.

Ventura Training Center

In an effort to expand employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated firefighters who served in a fire camp, the Ventura Training Center (VTC) was established at the Ventura Conservation Camp. Cal Fire, CDCR, and CCC, in partnership with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, developed an enhanced firefighter training and certification program. The VTC program runs for 18

³ <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ CWDB, *Interim Report for Evaluation of Workforce Development Programs submitted pursuant to Supplemental Report of the 2018-19 Budget Act, Item 7120-101-000* (Oct. 2021), p. 1 available at <https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2021/10/P2E-Interim-Report_ACCESSIBLE.pdf#:~:text=P2E%20funds%20the%20integration%20of%20workforce%20and%20reentry,r%20for%20the%20formerly%20incarcerated%20and%20justice-involved%20population>.>

⁶ *Id.* at p. 2.

⁷ *Id.* at p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Id.* at p. 4.

¹⁰ CWDB, *Prison to Employment (P2E 2.0) Award Announcements* available at <https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2023/01/P2E-2.0-Award-Announcement-Jan-2023_ACCESSIBLE.pdf>.

months, divided into three phases of training. The program began operating in October 2018. (<<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/ventura/>>

In order to be eligible for VTC, participants must have had minimum-custody status while incarcerated and were determined to be eligible after a review of their behavior in prison, medical and mental health issues, and time remaining to serve. Participants must also be recommended by Cal Fire, have no serious rules violations while serving at a fire camp or while on parole or probation; and have no conditions of parole or community supervision requirements that would restrict their participation in the program.¹¹

In addition to the job training provided at VTC, participants receive life skills training and resources, including employment skill assessments, money management, technology education, tutoring, career planning, developing resumes and cover letters, and searching and applying for employment, from the Anti-Recidivism Coalition.

6. Effect of This Bill

This bill seeks to build upon prior efforts to provide career options to fire camp participants following their release from incarceration. Specifically, this bill amends the joint advisory committee's responsibility to facilitate the post-release admission of graduates of pre-apprenticeship programs for incarcerated individuals into state-approved apprenticeship programs so that graduates of the fire camp program are included.

This bill also requires the joint advisory committee to facilitate the admission of graduates of the existing Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program into any relevant state-approved apprenticeship after they are released from prison. In addition, this bill requires state-approved apprenticeship programs to consider these individuals for admission with advanced standing based on their prior coursework and work experience.

This bill additionally requires that successful completion of the fire camp program, including, but not limited to, wildland firefighter training, such as environmental remediation and forestry management, emergency response, and hazardous waste cleanup, constitute qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship under the DAS.

Finally, this bill requires CDCR, in partnership with Cal Fire and the fire camp program, to ensure that all individuals who complete the fire camp program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience to ensure eligibility for state-approved apprenticeship programs.

7. Argument in Support

The California Public Defenders Association writes:

SB 1012 would require the joint advisory committee overseeing prerelease construction trades programming to facilitate the admission of graduates of the California Conservation Camp program into state-approved apprenticeship programs upon release. It would further clarify that successful completion of

¹¹ <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/ventura/>

conservation camp programming constitutes qualifying experience for such apprenticeships and would require that individuals receive certification documenting their training and work experience to ensure eligibility for these opportunities.

SB 1012 is important and necessary to ensure that individuals who have engaged in rigorous, demanding, and often dangerous work while incarcerated are not met with unnecessary barriers to employment upon release. Participants in conservation camp programs, including those trained in wildfire response, environmental remediation, and emergency services, acquire substantial, real-world skills that directly translate to the workforce. These individuals routinely perform physically demanding labor under high-risk conditions, often in service of protecting California communities and natural resources. Despite this, many face structural impediments to entering formal apprenticeship pathways, including the lack of recognized credentials and clear pathways to transition their experience into civilian employment. This bill addresses that gap by creating a clear and meaningful bridge between in-custody training and post-release employment.

Individuals leaving custody face significant challenges in securing stable employment, which is one of the most critical factors in reducing recidivism and promoting long-term community stability. By recognizing conservation camp training as qualifying experience and facilitating entry into apprenticeship programs, SB 1012 promotes successful reentry, enhances public safety, and ensures that the substantial labor and skill development performed by incarcerated individuals is appropriately valued. Employment not only provides financial stability, but also fosters dignity, structure, and a sense of purpose, factors that are essential to successful reintegration. This bill further ensures that individuals who have demonstrated discipline, commitment, and the ability to perform under demanding conditions are not excluded from opportunities for advancement due to technical or bureaucratic barriers.

It also strengthens California's workforce by creating a pipeline of trained individuals ready to contribute in high-need industries, including those essential to the state's response to natural disasters. At a time when California continues to face increasingly severe wildfire seasons and infrastructure demands, it is both practical and equitable to invest in a workforce that has already been trained and tested in these environments. By aligning correctional programming with workforce development needs, SB 1012 advances both public safety and economic efficiency.

CPDA supports this bill because it advances fairness, accountability, and rehabilitation within the criminal legal system. It acknowledges the contributions of incarcerated individuals who have performed vital public service and ensures that their efforts translate into meaningful opportunities upon release. It reflects a commitment to a system that not only imposes consequences, but also meaningfully prepares individuals for successful reentry and long-term stability.