
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 2204 **Hearing Date:** June 23, 2026
Author: Gabriel
Version: June 11, 2026
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: ML

Subject: *Prisons: organized sports programming*

HISTORY

Source: Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Prior Legislation: SB 551 (Cortese), Ch. 225, Stats. of 2025
AB 1104 (Bonta), Ch. 560, Stats. of 2023
AB 292 (Stone), Ch. 579, Stats. of 2021
AB 2590 (S. Weber), Ch. 696, Stats. of 2016

Support: California Police Chiefs Association; California Public Defenders Association;
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights; San Quentin Skunkworks; Smart Justice
California

Opposition: None known

Assembly Floor Vote: 78 - 0

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to require the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to establish a policy on organized sports programming at facilities operated by the department.

Existing law establishes the position of Secretary of CDCR and vests in that position responsibility for the care, custody, treatment, training, discipline, and employment of persons confined in state prisons. (Pen. Code, § 5054.)

Existing law authorizes CDCR to adopt regulations as necessary to implement the department's administrative duties. (Pen. Code, § 5058.)

Existing law provides that any amendments to existing regulations and any future regulations adopted by CDCR that may impact visitation of incarcerated persons shall do all of the following:

- Recognize and consider the value of visiting as a means to improve the safety of prisons for both staff and incarcerated persons;
- Recognize and consider the important role of incarcerated person visitation in establishing and maintaining a meaningful connection with family and community;

- Recognize and consider the important role of incarcerated person visitation in preparing an incarcerated person for successful release and rehabilitation. (Pen. Code, § 6400, subds. (a)-(c).)

Existing law provides that the essential purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation and successful community reintegration, which should be achieved through education, treatment, and active participation in rehabilitative and restorative justice programs. (Pen. Code, § 1170.)

Existing law requires CDCR to develop and implement policies for contraband interdiction at institutional entry points, including standardized screening procedures applicable to all individuals entering facilities, such as visitors, staff, volunteers, and contract employees. (Pen. Code, § 6402.)

Existing law establishes the Inmate Welfare Fund, which authorizes CDCR to fund programs for the benefit of incarcerated persons, including recreational and physical education activities, hobby programs, and other leisure-time services. (Pen. Code, § 5006.)

Existing law requires CDCR to provide incarcerated persons with access to recreational and physical education programs under safe and secure conditions, consistent with custodial classification and institutional operations. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220.)

Existing law permits CDCR to allow competitions between outside public teams and teams of incarcerated individuals if competitions take place within the facility and under the direct supervision of staff. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220, subd. (e).)

Existing law allows that incarcerated persons may voluntarily participate in athletic activities, contests, and games only if those activities are specifically authorized by the institution head or their designee. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220, subd. (f).)

Existing law authorizes CDCR to regulate recreational programming, including restricting activities that present safety risks and requiring supervision and medical clearance for certain activities. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220.1.)

Existing law authorizes CDCR to regulate and control access to its institutions through a visitor approval process, including establishing conditions necessary to ensure institutional safety and security. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3170.)

This bill establishes a policy in California to recognize participation in organized sports programming in state prisons as a form of rehabilitation.

This bill requires CDCR to adopt a department-wide policy on organized sports programming to be applied to all CDCR facilities by July 1, 2027.

This bill requires CDCR to consult with a wide range of stakeholders when creating the policy, including researchers and experts in sports and rehabilitation, criminal justice reform organizations, professional and semi-professional sports teams and leagues, CDCR staff, and organizations representing incarcerated persons and their families.

This bill requires CDCR to consider the following topics when adopting the policy:

- The safety of CDCR staff, incarcerated persons, and other participants;
- The appropriate use of CDCR resources and facilities by incarcerated persons;
- Eligibility requirements for participation; and
- Broader impacts to public safety.

This bill permits CDCR to solicit proposals, accept unsolicited proposals, negotiate, and enter into agreements with public and private entities, including professional sports teams, the University of California, the California State University, the California Community Colleges, and private universities for the purpose of expanding access to organized sports programming at CDCR facilities.

This bill establishes the Second Chance Sports Fund within the State Treasury, and requires:

- Funds deposited into the fund to be available, upon appropriation and approval of the Government Operations Agency, to support the expansion of organized sports programming at facilities operated by CDCR;
- The Government Operations Agency to seek advisement from the Legislature and CDCR on how to prioritize the use of the funds, and to approve the uses of the moneys;
- The fund to receive money from any source, including private donations;
- The funds to supplement, not replace, existing funding for recreational sports programming at CDCR; and
- No more than 5 percent of the funds to be used for administrative purposes.

This bill requires the State Treasurer to provide a report to the Legislature on the amounts deposited into the fund before January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter.

This bill includes legislative findings and declarations.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This Bill

The author writes:

Structured sports programming is a powerful tool to promote rehabilitation and help individuals successfully reintegrate into their communities. Sports help build discipline, teamwork, and accountability. AB 2204 – The Second Chance Sports Act – seeks to harness this power by requiring the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to adopt a policy to expand opportunities for organized sports for incarcerated persons and establishes a dedicated fund to support this effort. Through the transformative power of sports, The Second Chance Sports Act will make our prisons safer, support correctional staff, and help reduce crime when people return home, all while leveraging critical public-private partnerships to avoid burdening taxpayers.

2. Sports as Rehabilitation

Although there is limited research on the positive impact of sports programming, there are some studies that suggest structured sports programming in correctional settings may support improvements in institutional behavior, mental health, and post-release outcomes for incarcerated individuals. For example, the Twinning Project, a partnership between correctional systems and professional soccer clubs in England and Wales, was recently evaluated in collaboration with researchers at the University of Oxford. The evaluation found that participation in their soccer-based programming was associated with a significant reduction in disciplinary infractions, as well as increased social bonding and optimism regarding post-release outcomes.¹

More broadly, a systematic review and meta-analysis of sports-based interventions found that participation in such programs was associated with moderate improvements across a range of outcomes, including recidivism, anger control, substance use, and attitudes toward offending.² Additional research suggests that sports participation may contribute to improved mental health outcomes among incarcerated individuals, including reduced stress, improved emotional regulation, and increased social connection.³

3. Existing Law

Existing regulations already provide for rehabilitative programming, including recreational and physical activities. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220.) CDCR currently states on its website that “Physical Education and Recreation programs are provided at each institution.”⁴ Additionally, existing regulations provide that incarcerated persons may participate in athletic activities, contests, and games, even with outside organizations, so long as the program is authorized by institutional leadership. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220, subd. (f).) CDCR also permits access to approved visitors and outside organizations, including for the provision of recreational programs and activities, subject to institutional security requirements. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220, subd. (e).)

4. Effect of This Bill

This bill seeks to expand access to organized sports programming in state prisons by directing CDCR to develop a department-wide policy, facilitate partnerships with outside organizations, and establish a fund to support such programming. The bill is intended to increase opportunities for incarcerated persons to participate in structured athletic activities through collaboration with public and private entities, including colleges, universities, and professional sports teams. Specifically, the bill is intended to create more opportunities for incarcerated individuals to

¹Football-based social intervention found to improve chances of rehabilitation for prisoners (Oct. 15, 2024) University of Oxford <<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-10-15-football-based-social-intervention-found-improve-chances-rehabilitation-prisoners>> [as of June 12, 2026].

² Jugl, Bender & Lösel, *Do Sports Programs Prevent Crime and Reduce Reoffending? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis on the Effectiveness of Sports Programs* (2021) 39 *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 333 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-021-09536-3>> [as of June 12, 2026].

³ Hilpisch, Müller & Mutz, *Physical, Mental, and Social Health of Incarcerated Men: The Relevance of Organized and Informal Sports Activities* (2023) *Journal of Correctional Health Care* <<https://doi.org/10.1089/jchc.22.12.0093>> [as of June 12, 2026].

⁴ <<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/rehabilitation/oce/physical-education/>>

participate in programs like the San Quentin Giants,⁵ where outside organizations visit inside the prisons for sports programming.

The primary effect of this bill is to require CDCR to formalize and standardize a policy on organized sports programming and to consult with specified stakeholders in doing so. While the bill encourages expanded collaboration with outside entities and establishes a funding mechanism to support such efforts, it does not mandate that CDCR enter into specific partnerships, implement particular programs, or ensure that organized sports involving outside participants are available at a specific number of facilities.

Therefore, while the bill may provide additional structure, guidance, and potential funding opportunities for organized sports programming, its practical impact will largely depend on how CDCR exercises its existing discretion to implement and expand existing recreational sports programs.

5. Argument in Support

Smart Justice California writes:

AB 2204 would direct the California Department of Corrections (“CDCR”) to establish a policy on organized sports, in collaboration with researchers, nonprofits, athletic organizations, and correctional line staff. The legislation would allow CDCR to collaborate with public and private entities, such as colleges and universities or professional sports teams, to implement this sports policy. Additionally, the legislation would establish a state fund to support the expansion of rehabilitative sports programs. The fund would be able to receive donations from a variety of sources, including private philanthropy, further facilitating public-private partnerships like those at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

By providing additional support, investment, and collaboration, AB 2204 will provide meaningful opportunities for incarcerated people to participate in sports. Not only will this improve physical and mental health at CDCR facilities, but it will also help improve outcomes for our state’s incarcerated population, helping to make California a safer place.

-- END --

⁵ Tan, *The Best Baseball Team Behind Bars* (Nov. 24, 2025) N.Y. Times
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/24/us/san-quentin-prison-baseball-team.html>> [as of June 12, 2026].