
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Henry Stern, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No:	SB 272	Hearing Date:	April 13, 2021
Author:	Laird		
Version:	March 10, 2021		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	No
Consultant:	Catherine Baxter		

Subject: State government: gender-neutral terms: California Conservation Corps

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Conservation Corps (CCC) in the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to administer the state's conservation corps program.
- 2) Provides for the formation of certified community conservation corps, defined to mean a nonprofit public benefit corporation, as defined, or an agency operated by a city, county, or city and county, that is certified by the CCC as meeting specified criteria, including:
 - a) A community conservation corps consists of supervised work crews of young men and women who serve for one year, with the possibility of extension. Corps members engage in recycling and litter abatement projects, and natural resource management projects, as specified, among others.
 - b) The corps' program is based upon a highly disciplined work experience that includes an educational component. The educational component includes enrollment in a vocational education program, public or charter high school, or postsecondary community college.
 - c) A community conservation corps consists of an average annual enrollment of not less than 50 corps members between 18 and 25 years of age.
- 3) Enacts provisions related to public resources, including forestry.
- 4) Regulates the business of insurance in this state.
- 5) Places the Department of the California Highway Patrol under the control of a civil executive officer known as the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol who is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, as specified.

Background

There are 14 state-certified community conservation corps (local corps) in California. Their mission is to preserve and protect the environment and provide job skills training and educational opportunities to young adults. They are community-based

organizations that engage young adults in service projects addressing recreation, conservation, disaster response, and community needs. Through a term of service that could last from a few months to a year, corps members gain a high school diploma or GED, life skills, paid work experience, and job training. Each local corps works with or operates a charter school to provide educational services and help corps members connect to college and vocational education programs.

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would increase the age of eligibility to enroll in a local corps from 18-25 to 18-26. In addition, the bill would make changes to specified codes to use gender-neutral language.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, “While California has lead on efforts to promote diversity, equity, and equality, our laws have not kept pace. It’s time we change archaic references within state law that are future forward and adequately represent those who dedicate themselves to our state.”

According to Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara, “Words matter and our law should be updated to represent our diverse communities. Our laws should not be specific to male pronouns when referencing someone in office as these male-centric code sections do no justice to women in office as well as to individuals who are nonbinary. While simple in concept, gender-neutral language in state law makes California more inclusive for all. Otherwise, as written, these laws fail to represent the gender and non-binary diversity of all of our communities here in our great state.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received.

COMMENTS

This bill is double-referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. Elements of the bill under that Committee’s jurisdiction will be discussed there, and are included here for context and completeness only.

Gender neutral changes. This bill is consistent with ACR 260 (Low, Res. Chapter 190, Statutes of 2018) which encouraged the Legislature to engage in a coordinated effort to revise existing statutes and introduce new legislation with inclusive language by using gender-neutral pronouns or reusing nouns to avoid the use of gendered pronouns. That resolution found that “the use of the pronouns ‘he’ or ‘she’ for individuals is not inclusive of all transgender people, nonbinary people who may not ascribe to a particular or fixed gender, or people who otherwise use different pronouns.”

There are a number of universities, states, and other nations that now recognize a nonbinary gender and are taking steps to redraft their rules and laws to be more inclusive and avoid the use of gendered pronouns. In addition, the scientific literature suggests that gender-neutral language can help achieve more than symbolic change; for example, by contributing to the reduction of gender stereotyping and discrimination, and helping to reshape cultural norms.

Why raise the age of eligibility for local corps to 26? According to the author, the bill “allows [local corps] to capture a population of young adults who could use job training services but are currently ineligible for the program. Currently, young adults aged 18 to 25 are eligible for job training programs the local corps provide. Local corps also provide education opportunities for individuals to attain their high school diploma, and programs currently allow students to attend high school beyond their 26th birthday. Allowing 26 year-olds to be engaged and recognized within the job training programs supports alignment with the education programs offered by the 14 certified local conservation corps. This simple change to the statute will not solve the discrepancy, but will allow for a more inclusive approach while recognizing that the career pathway program is beneficial to wider age range of young adults. An estimated 100 young adults would benefit from this change.”

The 14 certified local corps in the state partner with or operate charter schools to provide educational services to their corps members. Generally, existing law allows a charter school to serve students up to age 19, unless the charter school is partnering with a workforce development program, like a local corps. In the latter case, there is no age cap for the charter school; the charter school can serve the same population served by the workforce development program. Therefore, the bill’s proposed change would not necessarily align local corps policies with charter school policies because existing law already aligns the charter school’s age range to that of their workforce development partners.

However, there is still benefit to adjusting the age range. Capping enrollment for certified local corps at 25 years of age generally made sense for previous generations because that met the demand at the time for the local corps’ services and provided important benefits to the young adults and society. More recently, the local corps and their charter school partners have noted that, on average, it is taking young adults more time to complete their educations and become established in jobs and careers than previous generations. This is especially true for the populations served by the local corps, many of whom are at risk youth who have dropped out of the school system and struggle to find job opportunities that provide a living wage and other benefits. The local corps have noted that authorization to serve 26 year olds would capture a significant proportion of this group while retaining the local corps’ foundational mission of serving young adults.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: None

SUPPORT

Kounalakis, Eleni, Lieutenant Governor
Lara, Ricardo, Insurance Commissioner
Democratic Women of Monterey County
Sacramento LGBT Community Center

OPPOSITION

None received.