

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1759 (Elhawary) – As Introduced February 9, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to contract with an independent research entity, selected by the Office of the Inspector General, to reassess CDCR's security classification system and report findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2028. The provision sunsets January 1, 2029.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Unknown but potentially significant costs (General Fund) to CDCR for a research contract with a university-based entity to reassess the department's security classification system. The bill requires a comprehensive study covering initial classification, annual reclassification, point adjustment methodology, and the use of administrative determinants and overrides, with policy recommendations for a new system. Comparable university-based corrections research contracts have cost in the range of several hundred thousand to low millions of dollars. CDCR anticipates that AB 1759 would result in General Fund cost pressures in the mid-millions of dollars to support a contract with an independent research entity to evaluate the CDCR's classification system. While the precise magnitude of contracting costs is unknown, the bill's compressed procurement and publication timeline may increase overall costs. Costs would include the external research contract and limited-term positions to support data extraction, validation, and coordination with the research entity, and classification subject matter expertise.
- 2) Minor, absorbable one-time costs to the Office of the Inspector General (General Fund) for staff time associated with implementing the bill. OIG estimates the new duties could be spread across its existing workforce, including its compliance unit and audit team for the substantive aspects of the work, and legal/business services for the contractual portion.
- 3) The bill does not require CDCR to implement any recommendations. Potential savings from implementation of a revised classification system—which the LAO estimated in 2019 could reach tens of millions of dollars annually—would depend on future legislative or administrative action.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

For far too long, many incarcerated individuals have been held in higher levels of security than necessary. AB 1759 would take steps toward ensuring that our security classification system is reflective of actual safety risks. Doing so will expand access to rehabilitation programs, and thereby, reduce recidivism. This is important because we must build up, rather than tear down, those who have been system-impacted.

- 2) **Background.** CDCR assigns each person committed to state prison a classification score during the reception process based on factors including commitment offense, sentence length, age at first arrest, prior incarcerations, gang involvement, and disciplinary history. The score determines assignment to one of four security levels (Level I through Level IV), with higher scores corresponding to more restrictive housing. The score is recalculated annually and can be adjusted through administrative overrides — for example, when staff determine that factors such as age, time remaining to serve, or behavior warrant placement at a different security level than the score alone would indicate. Higher security levels generally restrict access to rehabilitative programming, work assignments, and other activities that can earn sentence-reduction credits.

In 2019, the Legislative Analyst's Office published a report finding that CDCR's classification system may be assigning incarcerated people to more restrictive environments than necessary. The LAO identified several concerns: the department had modified the classification methodology without reassessing its accuracy; demographic changes in the incarcerated population could have caused the methodology's accuracy to deteriorate; and the methodology for annual reclassification had never been evaluated. The LAO recommended that CDCR contract with independent researchers to develop a new classification methodology. CDCR had previously worked with an expert panel of university researchers (from UC Davis, UCI, and UCLA) to evaluate the classification score system, but a comprehensive independent reassessment of the kind contemplated by this bill has not been conducted.

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