

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2026
Chief Counsel: Andrew Ironside

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Nick Schultz, Chair

AB 2204 (Gabriel) – As Amended March 16, 2026

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to establish a policy on organized sports programming at facilities operated by the department. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes a policy in California to recognize participation in organized sports programming in state prisons as a form of rehabilitation.
- 2) Requires CDCR to adopt a department-wide policy on organized sports programming to be applied to all CDCR facilities by July 1, 2027.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Requires CDCR to consider the following topics when adopting the policy:
 - a) The safety of CDCR staff, incarcerated persons, and other participants;
 - b) The appropriate use of CDCR resources and facilities by incarcerated persons;
 - c) Eligibility requirements for participation; and,
 - d) Broader impacts to public safety.
- 5) 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.
- 6) Establishes the Second Chance Sports Fund within the State Treasury, and requires:
 - a) 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;
 - b) The Government Operations Agency must seek advisement from the Legislature and CDCR on how to prioritize the use of the funds, and shall approve the uses of the

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- c) The fund to receive money from any source, including private donations;
 - d) The funds to supplement, not replace, existing funding for recreational sports programming at CDCR.
 - e) No more than 5 percent of the funds be used for administrative purposes.
- 7) 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.
- 8) Includes legislative findings and declarations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Secretary of CDCR and vests responsibility for the care, custody, treatment, training, discipline, and employment of persons confined in state prisons. (Pen. Code, § 5054.)
- 2) Authorizes CDCR to adopt regulations as necessary to implement the department's administrative duties. (Pen. Code, § 5058.)
- 3) 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:
 - a) Recognize and consider the value of visiting as a means to improve the safety of prisons for both staff and incarcerated persons;
 - b) Recognize and consider the important role of incarcerated person visitation in establishing and maintaining a meaningful connection with family and community;
 - c) 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).)
- 4) 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.)
- 5) 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.)
- 6) 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.)

- 7) 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.)
- 8) 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).)
- 9) Provides 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).)
- 10) 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.)
- 11) 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.)>

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: >

- 1) **Author's Statement:** According to the author, “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) **Effect of the 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 participate in programs like the San Quentin Giants¹, where outside organizations visit inside the prisons for sports programming.

However, the extent to which this bill would substantively change existing law may be limited. Existing regulations already provide for rehabilitative programming, including recreational and physical activities. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3220.) CDCR currently boasts

¹ [“The Best Baseball Team Behind Bars”](#) (N.Y. Times, Nov. 24, 2025)

on its website that, “Physical Education and Recreation programs are provided at each institution.”² 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).)

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.

- 3) **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.³

Similarly, a study conducted by the University of Southampton examining intensive sports programs for young adult offenders found that participants had a lower reconviction rate compared to typical prison populations and other improvements in behavioral indicators such as aggression, impulsivity, and conflict resolution.⁴

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.⁵ 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.⁶

² <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/rehabilitation/oce/physical-education/>

³ [Football-based social intervention found to improve chances of rehabilitation for prisoners | University of Oxford](#)

⁴ [Reducing Reoffending Rates | University of Southampton](#)

⁵ [Do Sports Programs Prevent Crime and Reduce Reoffending? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis on the Effectiveness of Sports Programs | Journal of Quantitative Criminology](#)

⁶ [Physical, Mental, and Social Health of Incarcerated Men: The Relevance of Organized and Informal Sports Activities | Journal of Correctional Health Care](#)

However, the extent to which this limited data supports a finding that sports programming is correlated with long-term reductions in recidivism remains uncertain. Reported reductions in reoffending vary across studies and appear to depend significantly on various factors such as program design, duration and intensity of participation, and the availability of post-release support services. Additionally, much of the existing research has been conducted in international settings, including the United Kingdom and other jurisdictions, raising questions about how these findings would apply within CDCR's institutional structure, population, and resource constraints. As a result, while the research on positive impacts of sports programming may be promising, it remains unclear how recreational sports programming would impact important public safety concerns like recidivism.

- 4) **Argument in Support:** According to According to the *California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA)*, "Correctional peace officers see firsthand the importance of effective rehabilitation programs in improving institutional safety and supporting successful reentry. AB 2204 takes a thoughtful step in that direction by expanding access to organized sports programming, which has been shown to improve physical and mental health, build discipline, and support positive behavioral outcomes.

"By directing CDCR to establish a structured policy and encouraging partnerships with colleges, universities, and professional organizations, this bill helps bring consistency and broader access to programs that are currently limited and uneven across facilities. The creation of a fund to support public-private partnerships will further strengthen these efforts without placing undue pressure on state resources."

5) **Related Legislation:**

- a) AB 1759 (Elhawary) would require CDCR to complete a study to reassess its security classification system. AB 1759 is set to be heard today in this committee.
- b) AB 2499 (Gipson) would enact the Climate Justice in Prisons Act to address conditions of confinement within state correctional facilities. AB 2499 is pending a hearing in the Assembly Labor and Employment Committee.
- c) AB 1645 (M. Gonzalez) would expand access to physical contact visits for incarcerated individuals. AB 1645 is pending a hearing in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

6) **Prior Legislation:**

- a) SB 551 (Cortese), Chapter 225, Statutes of 2025, codified the Legislature's intent that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) integrate the principles of normalization and dynamic security to create safer conditions for incarcerated people and correctional staff.
- b) AB 1104 (Bonta), Chapter 560, Statutes of 2023, stated that the deprivation of liberty to due to incarceration, in and of itself, satisfies the punishment aspect of sentencing, and that the purpose of incarceration is to rehabilitate a person so they can be successfully reintegrated into the community.

- c) AB 292 (Stone), Chapter 579, Statutes of 2021...
- d) AB 2590 (S. Weber), Chapter 696, Statutes of 2016, revised existing legislative declarations concerning the purpose of punishment to instead state that the purpose of sentencing is public safety achieved through accountability, rehabilitation, and restorative justice, as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

All of US or None Orange County
California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA)
California Police Chiefs Association
California Public Defenders Association
Californians for Safety and Justice (CSJ)
Courage California
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Families Inspiring Reentry & Reunification 4 Everyone (FIR4E)
Felony Murder Elimination Project
Jesse's Place Org
Rubicon Programs
Smart Justice California, a Project of Beyond Impact
Transformative Programming Works

Opposition

None submitted

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