

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2434 (Bonta) – As Amended April 7, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 8 - 1

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill, the Visitor Protections and Safety Act, establishes statutory standards governing visitation at California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) facilities.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires each CDCR facility to be open for visitation at least three days per week.
- 2) Provides that all visits shall be contact visits unless the incarcerated person is housed in a restricted housing unit, and requires contact visiting to be restored immediately upon return to nonrestricted housing.
- 3) Prohibits denial of visitation based on specified protected characteristics or for disciplinary matters or rule violations unrelated to visitation.
- 4) Requires CDCR to review pre-2027 visitation limitations at the incarcerated person's next annual classification review and modify them as necessary to conform to the bill.
- 5) Requires same-day written documentation of denials and searches exceeding routine screening, including appeal-rights information, in the top five languages spoken in California.
- 6) Requires written consent for any search beyond routine screening, supervisory approval and reasonable suspicion for unclothed body searches, and a court-issued warrant for strip searches, body cavity searches, and any search involving physical intrusion.
- 7) Prohibits strip, visual body cavity, and physical body cavity searches of visitors under 18, except with probable cause, a warrant, and written notice to and consent of the visitor and parent or guardian.
- 8) Requires CDCR to log searches beyond routine screening and to annually collect and publish aggregate data on searches, alerts, and resulting denials.
- 9) Establishes accommodations for visitors with medically implanted or prosthetic devices and visitors using wheelchairs or assistive devices.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Ongoing costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount, to CDCR (General Fund), potentially in the range of several million dollars, to implement the bill's visitation and search-related requirements. CDCR identifies the following cost drivers:
  - a) Operational and staffing costs to support expanded contact visitation, narrower denial authority, and additional procedural steps prior to restricting visitation or conducting certain searches.
  - b) Workload at headquarters and institution levels to implement expanded visitation access, same-day written notice and appeal processes, translation of specified notices, and annual data collection, reporting, and review of existing visitation limitations.
  - c) Translation costs for the three languages beyond English and Spanish that CDCR currently provides.
  - d) Data collection and reporting infrastructure to track and publish data regarding searches, alerts, and resulting denials, which CDCR indicates may require additional staffing and systems to support data collection, validation, and publication.

As noted below, many of these requirements exist in CDCR's current regulations.

- 2) Potentially substantial costs to CDCR (General Fund) to the extent it needs to construct or repurpose space to accommodate additional non-contact visiting areas to support alternative visits required under the bill. CDCR anticipates potential costs in codifying its existing three days per week in-person visitation policy without exception, particularly in the absence of flexibility for emergencies or staff training needs.
- 3) Unknown and potentially substantial costs to CDCR (General Fund) associated with increased appeals process workload, including processing same-day written notices, appeal-rights documentation, and additional layers of administrative review of denials and non-routine searches.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year beginning in the 2027-28 fiscal year.

#### COMMENTS:

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

Decades of research, including 18 studies, show unequivocally that visitation reduces recidivism, improves behavior while incarcerated, and helps people successfully return to their communities. [...] By making visitation unnecessarily burdensome, California prevents family unification and rehabilitation, which undermines the state's goal of reduced incarceration and harms our public safety.

- 2) **Background.** Existing CDCR regulations and Penal Code Section 6400 require regulations affecting visitation to recognize the value of visitation for prison safety, family connection, and successful reentry. Under existing regulations, CDCR facilities must provide at least 12 hours of visiting per week on consecutive days including Saturday and Sunday. CDCR

maintains three categories of visitation — in-person contact visits (the default for general-population incarcerated persons), in-person non-contact visits (used for incarcerated persons in reception, segregation, or other restricted statuses), and family or overnight visits — and applies search procedures including metal detection, electronic drug detection, passive alert canine search, hand-held wand inspection, clothed body search, and unclothed body search upon reasonable suspicion. Existing law and regulation prohibit forcible searches of visitors absent a warrant or lawful detention.

This bill establishes a statutory framework for visitation and visitor searches that codifies and extends portions of existing regulation, narrows the categories of incarcerated persons who may be limited to non-contact-only visitation to those in restricted housing units, prohibits visitation denial for disciplinary matters or rule violations unrelated to visitation — a category currently permitted under certain CDCR regulations. This bill also requires same-day written documentation of denials and non-routine searches, requires translation of notices into the top five languages spoken in California, and establishes annual aggregate data publication on searches, alerts, and denials.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1645 (M. González), of the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, prohibits CDCR regulations from unreasonably restricting nonsexual physical contact between incarcerated persons and visitors during contact visits and is pending in this committee.

AB 1646 (Bryan), of the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, establishes parallel contact-visit rights for youth in juvenile facilities and is pending in this committee.

- 4) **Prior Legislation.** AB 2709 (Bonta), of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, would have prohibited persons sentenced to state prison or county jail for a felony offense from being denied personal visits and was held in Senate Appropriations.

AB 990 (Santiago), of the 2021-2022 Legislative Session, would have made personal visits a civil right for incarcerated persons and was vetoed by the Governor, citing the likelihood of extensive and costly litigation as a basis for the veto.

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