
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 247 (Bryan) - Incarcerated individual hand crew members: wages

Version: June 27, 2025

Urgency: Yes

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: PUB. S. 6 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Liah Burnley

Bill Summary: AB 247 requires incarcerated hand crew members to be paid \$7.25 per hour while assigned to an active fire.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) indicates that, as of July 2025, approximately 1,997 incarcerated individuals are assigned to conservation camps, with around 1,150 qualified as fire line hand crew members. In addition to hand crews, participants may also serve in support and maintenance roles such as cooks, laundry workers, landscapers, and water treatment plant operators. It is unclear how significantly increasing the hourly rate of pay will impact the population at the camps as it could create further incentives for eligible individuals to participate in the camp program. Currently, CDCR pays incarcerated firefighters a daily rate ranging \$5.80 to \$10.24, depending on the role. In addition to this daily rate, incarcerated hand crew members are paid \$1.00 per hour while actively engaged in fire suppression. This equates to total wages of \$29.80 to \$34.24 for a 24-hour shift on an active fire. CDCR notes that, while future fire season severity is difficult to predict, the table below reflects the estimated cost impact of increasing the hourly wage from \$1.00/hr. to \$7.25/hr. based on prior calendar years:

Calendar Year	CDCR Contributed Labor Response Hours	Current Hourly Wage Costs (\$1.00/hr.)	Proposed Hourly Wage Costs (\$7.25/hr.)	Difference/Expected Increase
2020	2,095,453	\$2,095,453	\$15,192,034	\$13,096,581
2021	1,372,819	\$1,372,819	\$9,952,938	\$8,580,119
2022	839,986	\$839,986	\$6,089,899	\$5,249,913
2023	781,689	\$781,689	\$5,667,245	\$4,885,556
2024	1,820,637	\$1,820,637	\$13,199,618	\$11,378,981
Five-Year Average	1,382,117	\$1,382,117	\$10,020,347	\$8,638,230

The proposed wage increase could have tax implications for incarcerated individuals and may require CDCR to develop or enhance its accounting infrastructure to manage the changes. While the full scope of these impacts is currently unknown, they could be substantial and ongoing, likely \$1 million at

minimum to develop the necessary pay infrastructure, which will include necessary support staff and technology updates.

Since AB 247 includes an urgency clause and would take effect immediately upon enactment, the new wage structure would have to be implemented without the benefit of lead time. This accelerated timeline could create downstream cost pressures by requiring staff to expedite development or modification of accounting systems capable of managing adjusted wages and tax obligations. In the absence of existing infrastructure to support these functions, CDCR may need to divert resources, authorize temporary staffing, or contract with external vendors, which could contribute to additional, unanticipated fiscal impacts.

- Non-reimbursable local costs for increased pay for incarcerated firefighters in county custody.

Background: Incarcerated hand crew members housed at one of the state's fire camps are compensated for each day's work within the month. The standard workweek is five eight-hour days, Monday through Friday, with Saturdays, Sundays, and approved holidays off. The current compensation is \$5.80 and \$10.24 per day based on skill level and position. These individuals earn an additional \$1 per hour while assigned to an active emergency. During active emergencies, individual hand crews generally work a 24-hour shift, followed by 24-hour rest period, and are paid during rest periods.

Individuals incarcerated in a county jail may similarly earn credits for participation in a sheriff's conservation camp or successful completion of training for assignment to a conservation camp as an incarcerated firefighter. These individuals are eligible to earn two days of credit for every one day served.

Proposed Law:

- Provides that incarcerated individual hand crewmembers, in county jails and state prisons, shall be paid an hourly wage equal of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident. The wage rate shall be updated annually.
- Provides that a ward or youth placed at the Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp shall be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident. The wage rate shall be updated annually.

Staff Comments: Paying incarcerated persons an increased wage could potentially result in significant cost pressures to the state and counties, but a fraction could be offset by an increase in state and local income tax, paid restitution fines to compensate victims of crime and the state Restitution Fund¹, and to family support and court ordered debt via wage garnishments. To the extent incarcerated hand crews earn more pay for their labor, this bill could have other unknown effects on state and local government

¹ CDCR automatically collects 50% of prison wages or other money deposited into an incarcerated person's trust account to pay court ordered restitution. CDCR always collects money to pay direct orders to victims before collecting money to pay for restitution fines, which are deposited into the Restitution Fund. The Restitution Fund has been operating under a structural deficiency for a number of years.

programs. For example, it could reduce the need for people exiting the incarceration to rely on government services, such as subsidized housing.

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