

## CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 247 (Bryan)

As Amended September 5, 2025

2/3 vote. Urgency

**SUMMARY**

Requires incarcerated individual hand crew members from county jails and state prison, and youth placed at the Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp, to be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident and to have the wage rate updated on an annual basis.

**Senate Amendments**

- 1) Require that individual hand crew members incarcerated in a state prison or county jail, or a ward hand crew member placed at Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp, be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident.
- 2) Requires the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and counties to maintain regulations regarding an administrative adjudication and remedy process for any dispute over sums owed, as specified, for incarcerated individual hand crew members assigned to a conservation camp, facility, or institution.
- 3) Add an urgency clause and make technical changes.

**COMMENTS****According to the Author**

"Incarcerated people who fight fires heroically step forward to protect communities statewide. They currently earn \$5 to \$10 per day. Crews typically work grueling 24-hour shifts – although this year's Los Angeles fires saw many working double that. AB 247 will ensure that incarcerated people on the front line of fire disasters receive fair compensation for their invaluable service during devastating fires. This bill is a step forward in recognizing and compensating the essential work that incarcerated workers do for our state during unprecedented disasters."

**Arguments in Support**

According to *Initiate Justice*, a cosponsor of this bill, "We believe this legislation strikes at the heart of the many injustices facing incarcerated firefighters, who demonstrate the same level of bravery, sacrifice, and commitment to protecting our communities as non-incarcerated firefighters, yet face extreme disparities in pay.

"Initiate Justice fights to end mass incarceration by activating the political power of those directly impacted by it. Reaching over 60,000 people currently incarcerated in California's state prisons and training hundreds of advocates inside and outside of our prisons, we advocate for policy change that centers the lived experiences of those most affected by incarceration. Incarcerated people are too often seen as disposable, and are not recognized for their positive contributions to our communities.

"The state of California has relied on incarcerated labor since its inception, and specifically for fire response for nearly 100 years. Known as the Conservation Camp Program, it is a program jointly run by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). During the height of the program, prior to many of the policy reforms enacted by the Legislature towards reducing the state prison population, as many as a third of all CAL FIRE firefighters were incarcerated.

"Incarcerated firefighters normally work on what are known as 'hand crews' conducting the grueling work of charting paths to slow the spread of fires using hand tools such as chainsaws, axes, and shovels. They are tasked with cutting down fire lines and removing "fuel" (i.e. debris like dead branches and leaves) from close to structures. During active deployments, incarcerated hand crews are often working 24-hour shifts right alongside non-incarcerated firefighters.

"While the prison population - including the population of people in fire camps and houses - has reduced in recent years as a result of positive reforms, incarcerated firefighters continue to play a vital role in our state's response to these emergencies. Indeed, as Los Angeles County faced the most destructive wildfires in its history in January 2025, over 1,100 of the firefighters deployed to assist the city and county in its response were incarcerated.

"Despite the enormity of our state's reliance on these firefighters, people in prison who are fire crew members are paid as little as \$5.80 per day by CDCR, and receive a shamefully low additional \$1 per hour, paid by CAL FIRE, during their active deployment. By increasing their pay to equal what the lowest paid non-incarcerated firefighter receives during active deployment, AB 247 takes a strong step towards ending the exploitative pay inequities that exist.

"Our incarcerated firefighters deserve dignity in pay for their relentless work in safeguarding our lives, communities, and properties." (citations omitted)

### **Arguments in Opposition**

The *California State Sheriff's Association* states, "Under existing law, any inmate who has completed training for assignment to a conservation camp or to a state or county facility as an inmate firefighter or who is assigned to a county or state correctional institution as an inmate firefighter shall earn two days of credit for every one day served in that assignment or after completing that training.

"We recognize the contribution made by inmate firefighters and in return for their service, these inmates earn very generous early release credits that reduce their sentences. Every day served in this role earns two additional days of credit, meaning an inmate would only serve one-third of their sentence for the time they qualify.

"AB 247 could also create significant fiscal pressure on counties already facing challenging budget times. Counties, if they are to be responsible for paying this new wage, would be forced to consider a substantial new cost when determining if and how to deploy inmate firefighters."

### **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) 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.

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

## VOTES:

### ASM PUBLIC SAFETY: 8-0-1

**YES:** Schultz, Alanis, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Lackey, Nguyen, Sharp-Collins

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Ramos

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 9-0-6****YES:** Wicks, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Sanchez, Arambula, Calderon, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa**ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0-5****YES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Macedo, Ortega, Ramos, Tangipa, Valencia**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 12-2-1****YES:** Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache**NO:** Ta, Tangipa**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Sanchez**UPDATED**

VERSION: September 5, 2025

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FN: 0002005