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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND RETIREMENT**  
**Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, Chair**  
**2025 - 2026 Regular**

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| <b>Bill No:</b>    | AB 2483       | <b>Hearing Date:</b> | July 1, 2026 |
| <b>Author:</b>     | Elhawary      |                      |              |
| <b>Version:</b>    | June 24, 2026 |                      |              |
| <b>Urgency:</b>    | No            | <b>Fiscal:</b>       | Yes          |
| <b>Consultant:</b> | Glenn Miles   |                      |              |

**SUBJECT:** Wildland firefighters: Formerly Incarcerated Firefighter Certification and Employment Program

**KEY ISSUE**

This bill requires CAL FIRE to develop and provide a certification, as specified, to incarcerated individuals upon their successful completion of training and experience in a California Conservation Fire Camp that serves to meet qualifications for entry-level Firefighter Level I positions with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) after release. The bill also requires CAL FIRE to award a hiring preference under Category Placement 2 to formerly incarcerated firefighters who have received the described certification.

**ANALYSIS**

**Existing law:**

- 1) Establishes CAL FIRE to oversee and administer programs related to forest health and fire prevention and response. (Public Resources Code, § 701.)
- 2) Establishes the California Conservation Corps (CCC) in the Natural Resources Agency and requires the CCC to implement and administer the conservation corps program. (Public Resources Code, § 14001.)
- 3) Establishes the California Conservation Camp program to be operated by CDCR in conjunction with Cal Fire to provide for training and use of inmates assigned to the camps to perform public conservation projects including, but not limited to, forest fire prevention and control, forest and watershed management, recreation, fish and game management, soil conservation, and forest and watershed revegetation. (Public Resources Code, § 4951.)
- 4) Defines “California Conservation Camps” as any camps established for the purpose of receiving wards or incarcerated individuals who are committed to the custody of CDCR, and in which the work projects performed by the wards or incarcerated individuals are supervised by CDCR employees. (Public Resources Code, § 4952.)
- 5) Requires CDCR to utilize incarcerated individuals and wards assigned to conservation camps in performing fire prevention, fire control, and other work of the department. (Public Resources Code, § 4953, subd. (a).)
- 6) Establishes the Education and Employment Reentry Program within the CCC and authorizes the director of CCC to enroll formerly incarcerated individuals who successfully served on a

California Conservation Camp program crew for participation as a program member by the Director of Cal Fire and the Secretary of CDCR. (Public Resources Code, § 14415.1.)

- 7) Authorizes any department, division, bureau, commission or other agency of the State of California or the Federal Government to use or cause to be used individuals confined in the state prisons to perform work necessary and proper to be done by them at permanent, temporary, and mobile camps to be established under this article. Authorizes the director to enter into contracts for the purposes of work, as specified. (Penal Code, § 2780.)
- 8) Creates the state civil service that includes every officer and employee of the state except a limited number of specified, exempted officers and employees. Existing law also requires that the state make “permanent appointment and promotion in the civil service under a general system based on merit ascertained by competitive examination.” Case law and custom refer to this provision as the merit principle and it governs the administration of the state’s civil service system. (CA CONST. art. VII, §1 and §4)
- 9) Establishes the State Personnel Board (SPB) to enforce the civil service statutes and prescribe probationary periods and classifications, adopt other rules authorized by statute, and review disciplinary actions. (CA CONST. art. VII, §2 and §3)
- 10) Provides that “every person shall be disqualified from holding any office of profit in this State who shall have been convicted of having given or offered a bribe to procure personal election or appointment”. (CA CONST. art. VII, §)
- 11) Requires that laws be made to exclude persons convicted of bribery, perjury, forgery, malfeasance in office, or other high crimes from office or serving on juries. The privilege of free suffrage shall be supported by laws regulating elections and prohibiting, under adequate penalties, all undue influence thereon from power, bribery, tumult, or other improper practice. (CA CONST. art. VII, §2 and §3)
- 12) Provides that a person is disqualified from holding any office upon conviction of designated crimes as specified in the Constitution and laws of the State. (Government Code § 1021)
- 13) Disqualifies, as specified, persons from holding office as a peace officer or being employed as a peace officer of the state, county, city, city and county, or other political subdivision, whether with or without compensation, and provides that they are disqualified from any office or employment by the state, county, city, city and county, or other political subdivision, whether with or without compensation, which confers upon the holder or employee the powers and duties of a peace officer. ((Government Code § 1029)

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after July 1, 2027, in partnership with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the California Conservation Camp program, to implement a standardized process to ensure that all eligible individuals who successfully complete training in a department firefighting training camp while incarcerated receive official written certification reflective of the training completed before their release from prison.

- 2) Requires the certification to include certification commensurate with the individual's training towards meeting relevant minimum requirements for Fire Fighter 1 Classification or Forestry Technician Classification.
- 3) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after January 1, 2028, to award hiring preference to the qualified formerly incarcerated individual under Category Placement 2, if the individual applies for a CAL FIRE Fire Fighter 1 Classification position, or any successor classifications; has the required training; and meets the minimum qualifications for the position.
- 4) Requires CAL FIRE, on and after January 1, 2028, to count the duration of training, as specified, and field work as an incarcerated hand crew member, towards the Forestry Technician classification minimum qualifications if the individual applies for a CAL FIRE Forestry Technician Classification position, or any successor classifications.
- 5) Provides that this bill's provisions shall not preclude CAL FIRE from placing a formerly incarcerated person in a higher category for hiring based on their level of training, certification, employment history, or other factors.
- 6) Provides that this bill's provisions shall not preclude other state agencies with wildland management responsibilities from establishing similar pathways to support wildfire prevention, mitigation, and response efforts with priority hiring reserved for formerly incarcerated individuals who completed the FFT program.
- 7) Defines "qualified formerly incarcerated individual" to mean any formerly incarcerated individual who successfully completed training in a CAL FIRE firefighting training camp, has a valid certification pursuant to this bill's provisions, and has successfully participated as an incarcerated hand crew member in the California Conservation Camp program as described in Section 1203.4b of the Penal Code.

## **COMMENTS**

### **1. Need for this bill?**

According to the author:

"Without recognized certification, formerly incarcerated hand crew members face barriers to employment after release. Even with real-world experience and critical skills, they are often ineligible for jobs because they lack formal credentials.

This gap limits access to stable careers, despite these individuals having demonstrated the discipline and skills needed to protect lives and property.

Employment is a key factor in successful reentry. Without clear job pathways, many face uncertainty and a higher risk of returning to the system."

### **2. Proponent Arguments:**

According to the Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program:

“AB 2483 does not lower standards or hand out unearned credentials. It creates a pathway for qualified individuals to meet industry requirements and continue serving our communities. California faces an ongoing wildfire crisis. We cannot afford to waste trained talent. AB 2483 ensures that incarcerated firefighters’ contribution doesn’t end when their sentence does—it allows them to continue building purpose and pride through service. Without a standard, industry-recognized certificate of participation, formerly incarcerated hand crew members face major barriers to employment. Despite their real-world firefighting experience, uncredentialed individuals face limited access to stable careers which undermine their ability to protect our statewide community.”

According to the Prosecutors Alliance Action:

“AB 2483 would provide certification to incarcerated individuals, prior to release, if they successfully complete training in California Conservation Fire Camp. These certifications would prepare hard-working and qualified individuals to apply for entry-level Firefighter Level I positions with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) after release. The bill would provide that CAL FIRE award hiring preference under Category Placement 2 to formerly incarcerated firefighters who have received the described certification. This does not move anyone to the front of the line, but it increases the likelihood that a person will be able to work as a firefighter post-release.

For decades, California's firefighting force has included incarcerated individuals who have served alongside CAL FIRE, local, state, out-of-state, and international firefighters. These brave individuals complete thorough training and hours of practical work, but do not receive the certification that would allow them to work for CAL FIRE after release.”

### 3. Opponent Arguments:

None received.

4. **Dual Referral:** The Senate Rules Committee referred this bill to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water and the Senate Committee on Labor, Public Employment and Retirement.

### 5. Prior Legislation:

AB 1380 (Elhawary, 2025) would direct the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) to implement a standardized process to ensure that all individuals who complete the department’s firefighting training program while incarcerated receive official written certification before their release; require the Department to award hiring preference to qualified formerly incarcerated individuals; and track incarcerated individuals who have completed the firefighting training program and report to the Legislature the effectiveness of the program. *The Senate Appropriations Committee held this bill on its suspense file.*

AB 409 (Weber, 2023) would have required CAL FIRE, by January 1, 2026, to modify its training program for inmate firefighters serving as members of a hand crew through the California Conservation Camp program to provide participants the opportunity to earn a specified list of certifications related to firefighting, or the department’s equivalents of those certifications, while incarcerated. The bill would have, commencing January 1, 2027, required the department to update its application process for Type 1 Hand Crew positions to

recognize certifications earned by formerly incarcerated individuals through participation in the California Conservation Camp program. The bill would have also required the department to establish rules that provide eligibility priority rankings in the application, interview, and hiring process to formerly incarcerated individuals who earned certifications through participation in a California Conservation Camp program. *The Assembly Natural Resources Committee held this bill in committee.*

AB 1908 (Maienschein, 2021) would have allowed an incarcerated individual, who successfully participated and completed training in a program, as specified, as an incarcerated individual hand crewmember, to be eligible for a firefighter certificate provided by the CAL FIRE. This bill would state the intent as well as findings and declarations of the Legislature relating to incarcerated individuals receiving firefighting certificates. *The Assembly Natural Resources Committee held this bill in committee.*

### **SUPPORT**

Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program (Co-Sponsor)  
Prosecutors Alliance Action (Co-Sponsor)  
All Hands Ecology  
California Association of Local Conservation Corps  
California Forestry Association  
Center for Employment Opportunities  
Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association  
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
Greater Sacramento Urban League  
Indivisible CA StateStrong  
Lake Tahoe Community College (fire Academy; Fire & Forestry; Rising Scholars Program)  
Michelson Center for Public Policy  
Redefine Alliance  
UC Berkeley's Underground Scholars Initiative  
Vera Institute of Justice

### **OPPOSITION**

None received

**-- END --**