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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>	SB 1012	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	April 22, 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Smallwood-Cuevas		
<b>Version:</b>	April 15, 2026		
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Jazmin Marroquin		

**SUBJECT:** Employment of inmates

**KEY ISSUE**

This bill requires a joint advisory committee, as specified, in consultation with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), and the California Conservation (fire) Camp program, to facilitate the admission of graduates of the program, after release, into any relevant state-approved apprenticeship and for state-approved apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades, as specified, to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience. It also requires CDCR, in partnership with the CAL FIRE and the fire camp program, to ensure that all individuals who complete the program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience to ensure eligibility for state-approved apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades.

**ANALYSIS**

**Existing law:**

- 1) Establishes the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and provides that the primary objective of adult incarceration in CDCR is to facilitate the successful reintegration of the individuals in the department's care back to their communities equipped with the tools to be drug-free, healthy, and employable members of society by providing education, treatment, and rehabilitative and restorative justice programs, all in a safe and humane environment to promote personal growth for all residents, as specified. (Penal Code §§5000-5035)
- 2) Provides that CDCR must require every able-bodied incarcerated individual imprisoned in any state prison as many hours of faithful labor in each day and every day during the person's term of imprisonment as is prescribed by the rules and regulations of the Secretary. (Penal Code §2700)
- 3) Authorizes CDCR to cause prisoners in the prisons of this state to be employed in the rendering of emergency services for the preservation of life or property within the state, as specified, when a county level state of emergency has been declared due to a natural disaster and the local governing board has requested the assistance of CDCR. (Penal Code §2701)

- 4) Provides that, in addition to specified credits, incarcerated individual hand crew members shall be paid an hourly wage equal to seven dollars and twenty-five cents (\$7.25) while assigned to an active fire incident. The wage rate shall be reviewed annually. (Penal Code §2714).
- 5) Establishes the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program, administered by CDCR, to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for inmates upon release. (Penal Code §2716.5)
  - a) Requires CDCR to establish a joint advisory committee for the purpose of implementation of this program.
  - b) Requires the committee to be composed of representatives from building and construction trades employee organizations, the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, joint apprenticeship training programs, the California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority, the Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and any other representatives the department determines appropriate. Requires the committee to:
    - i) Develop guidelines for the participation of inmates in preapprenticeship training programs, as described. The guidelines will provide for the integration, for all inmate preapprenticeship training programs in the building and construction trades, of the multicraft core curriculum implemented by the State Department of Education for its California Partnership Academies pilot project and by the California Workforce Development Board and local boards.
    - ii) Develop and implement a prerelease construction trades certification that validates that an inmate completed instruction, skills, and competencies required by and recognized by the participating building and construction trades.
    - iii) Ensure compliance with any applicable requirements and regulations of the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS).
    - iv) Evaluate prerelease on-the-job training opportunities to compare and match competencies with those of registered apprentices in the building and construction trades.
    - v) Explore the feasibility of the electronic tracking of each participating inmate's relevant activities to efficiently capture competencies related to the certification.
    - vi) Explore the prerelease awarding of formal credit for apprenticeship hours recognized by joint apprenticeship training programs and the DAS.
    - vii) Facilitate the admission of graduates of inmate preapprenticeship programs, after release, into state-approved apprenticeship programs and for apprenticeship programs to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.
- 6) Establishes the California Conservation Camp Program to provide for the training and use of the inmates and wards assigned to conservation camps in the furtherance of public conservation. Provides that it is the policy of the state to require the inmates and wards assigned to such 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 §§4951-4958)
- 7) Provides that, notwithstanding any other law, any inmate assigned to a conservation camp by CDCR, who is eligible to earn one day of credit for every one day of incarceration, as

specified, will instead earn two days of credit for every one day of service. (Penal Code § 2933.3)

- 8) Establishes the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to oversee and administer programs related to forest health and fire prevention and response. (Public Resources Code §701)
- 9) Establishes the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) in the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA), and vests it with various powers and duties to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners of California, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment. (Labor Code §50.5)
- 10) Establishes the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) within DIR to oversee apprenticeship programs and requires the Chief of the Division to perform various functions to promote the welfare of apprentices. (Labor Code §3070 et seq.)
- 11) Creates, within DAS, the California Apprenticeship Council (CAC), which issues rules and regulations that establish standards for minimum wages, maximum hours, and working conditions for apprentice agreements in the building and construction trades and for firefighter occupations, as specified. (Labor Code §3070 et seq.)
- 12) Creates, within DAS, the Interagency Advisory Committee on Apprenticeship (IACA), which provides advice and guidance to the Administrator of Apprenticeship and Chief of DAS on the development and administration of standards governing preapprenticeship, certification, and on-the-job training and retraining programs *outside* the building and construction trades and firefighters. (Labor Code §3071.5)
- 13) Authorizes a joint apprenticeship committee, unilateral management or labor apprenticeship committee, or an individual employer to administer an apprenticeship program. The Chief may approve programs in any trade in the state or in a city or trade area, whenever the apprentice training needs justify the establishment. Where a collective bargaining agreement exists, a program shall be jointly sponsored unless either party to the agreement waives its right to representation in writing. (Labor Code §3075)
- 14) Defines “apprentice” to mean a person at least 16 years of age who has entered into a written agreement, or apprentice agreement, with an employer or program sponsor. The Chief shall approve the term of apprenticeship for each apprenticeable occupation, as specified. (Labor Code §3077)
- 15) Provides that the term of apprenticeship may be measured either through the completion of the industry standard for hours of on-the-job learning and related and supplemental instruction, attainment of competency, or a hybrid blend of the time-based and competency-based approaches, as specified, but that programs in the building and construction trades and for firefighters shall use the time-based approach. (Labor Code §3078.5)
- 16) Establishes the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB), under the purview of the LWDA, as the body responsible for assisting the Governor in the development, oversight, and continuous improvement of California’s workforce system, including its alignment to the needs of the economy and the workforce. (Unemployment Insurance Code §14010 et seq.)

- 17) Requires the CWDB and each local board to ensure that programs and services, as specified, including preapprenticeship training, are conducted, to the maximum extent feasible, in coordination with one or more apprenticeship programs approved by the DAS for the occupation and geographic area, as specified. (Unemployment Insurance Code §14230)

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires the joint advisory committee, as specified, in consultation with specified state entities, to additionally facilitate the admission of *graduates of the California Conservation Camp program* after release into state-approved apprenticeships and apprenticeship programs, as specified.
- 2) Requires the joint advisory committee, as specified, in consultation with CDCR, CAL FIRE, DIR, and the fire camp program, to facilitate the admission of graduates of the program, after release, into any relevant state-approved apprenticeship and for state-approved apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades, including those in general construction, to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.
- 3) Provides that successful completion of conservation camp programs, including, but not limited to, wildland firefighter training, such as environmental remediation and forestry management, emergency response, and hazardous waste cleanup, constitutes qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship in the building and construction trades under the DAS.
- 4) Requires CDCR, in partnership with the CAL FIRE and the fire camp program, to ensure that all individuals who complete the program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience to ensure eligibility for state-approved apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades.
- 5) Provides that nothing in this section will preclude state-approved apprenticeship programs outside of the building and construction trades under the DAS from evaluating graduates of the fire camp program for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.

**COMMENTS**

**1. Background:**

*Apprenticeships and Preapprenticeships*

The DAS administers the state's apprenticeship laws and enforces apprenticeship standards for wages, hours, working conditions and the specific skills required for state certification as a journey person in an apprenticeable occupation. In general, apprenticeship programs provide instruction that combines a formal course of in-class instruction with practical "on-the-job" training.

Preapprenticeship services and programs are designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in registered apprenticeship programs. These programs have a documented partnership with at least one registered apprenticeship program sponsor and together, they expand the participant's career pathway opportunities with industry-based training coupled with classroom instruction.

The Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) is a pre-apprenticeship training program that was developed in 2007 by North America's Building Trades Union. It was designed to identify common elements in all building and construction trades' apprenticeship programs and combine them into one curriculum encompassing 120 hours of training. Among other things, the curriculum includes general orientation to apprenticeships, an introduction to the construction industry, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid, an Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification course, applied mathematics for construction, and blueprint reading.

*Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program*

In 2018, the Legislature established the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certification Program, administered by CDCR, to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for inmates upon release. The program is overseen by a joint advisory committee, composed of representatives from building and construction trades employee organizations, the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, joint apprenticeship training programs, the California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority, the DAS, the LWDA, and any other representatives the department determines appropriate.

The joint advisory committee is tasked with developing guidelines for the participation of inmates in preapprenticeship training programs. The guidelines must include the integration of the MC3 implemented by the State Department of Education for its California Partnership Academies pilot project and by the CDWB and local workforce development boards for all inmate preapprenticeship training programs in the building and construction trades. The joint advisory committee must also develop and implement a prerelease construction trades certification that validates an individual's completed instruction and skills required by and recognized by the participating building and construction trades. The committee facilitates the admission of graduates of inmate preapprenticeship programs, after release, into state-approved apprenticeship programs and for apprenticeship programs to evaluate such individuals for admission with advanced standing based on prior coursework and work experience.

*California Conservation Camp program*

The primary mission of the Conservation (Fire) Camp Program is to support state, local, and federal government agencies as they respond to emergencies including fires, floods, and other natural disasters.

CDCR initiated the Fire Camp Program to provide able-bodied incarcerated people with the opportunity to work on meaningful projects throughout the state.<sup>1</sup> The CDCR road camps were established in 1915. During World War II (WWII), much of the workforce that was used by the Division of Forestry (now known as CAL FIRE) was depleted so CDCR provided the necessary workforce by having incarcerated people occupy "temporary camps" to augment the regular firefighting forces. During WWII, there were 41 "interim camps,"

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/>

which would become the foundation for the network of camps in operation today. CDCR, in cooperation with the CAL FIRE and the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACFD), jointly operates 35 conservation camps, commonly known as fire camps, located in 25 counties across California. Two of the camps are for incarcerated women. All camps are minimum-security facilities and staffed with correctional staff.

CDCR employees oversee the fire camps and CDCR is responsible for the selection, supervision and discipline of camp participants. When responding to a wildfire or working on conservation projects, a CAL FIRE fire captain is responsible for their custody. The fire captain acts as the supervisor for the hand crew, which can include up to 17 people. Custody transfers back to correctional staff when the hand crews end their shift and return to either the camp or a base camp. Crews are directly supervised 24 hours per day on work projects and while assigned to emergencies. CAL FIRE assigns conservation projects for the crews. Prior to the start of a project, CDCR and CAL FIRE staff members evaluate the project site to ensure there are no security issues.

The Fire Camp Program paves the way for several job opportunities and benefits after release, including advanced training and criminal record expungement. When not assigned to an emergency, crews complete community service projects in areas close to their camp. Hand crews use hand tools to aid fire suppression during wildland fires, they do not use water or hoses. Participants can also work as camp support and maintenance staff including cooks, laundry workers, landscapers and water treatment plant operators. These pathways allow formerly incarcerated people to seek professional emergency response certifications that were not previously available to them.

According to the CDCR website, incarcerated fire crew members assigned to conservation camps earn between \$5.80 and \$10.24 per day while housed, working, and training at the camp, paid by CDCR, depending on skill level. In 2025, the Governor signed AB 247 (Bryan, Chapter 681) into law, which increased the hourly wage for fire camp participants to \$7.25 per hour while assigned to an active fire incident, regardless of skill level. During emergencies, crews may work 24-hour shifts followed by 24 hours of rest. Fire camp participants also earn time credits. Most incarcerated fire crew members receive 2-for-1 credits, meaning they receive two additional days off their sentence for every one day they serve on a fire crew. Fire camp volunteers who work as support staff, but not on a fire crew, receive day-for-day credits, meaning they receive one day off their sentence for every one day they serve as a firefighter. Incarcerated firefighters may gain employment with CAL FIRE after their release because a felony conviction does not disqualify employment with CAL FIRE. Many former fire camp firefighters go on to gain employment with CAL FIRE and the United States Forest Service.<sup>2</sup>

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

According to the author, “Successful reentry into society after incarceration remains a significant challenge, as formerly incarcerated individuals often face systemic barriers to

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<sup>2</sup> CAL FIRE, California Conservation Corps, and CDCR, in partnership with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, developed an 18-month enhanced firefighter training and certification program at the Ventura Training Center (VTC), located in Ventura County. The VTC trains formerly incarcerated people on parole who have recently been part of a trained firefighting workforce housed in fire camps or institutional firehouses operated by CAL FIRE and CDCR. VTC cadets who complete the program are qualified to apply for entry-level firefighting jobs with local, state, and federal firefighting agencies. <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/ventura/>

sustainable, long-term careers. Despite past investments, the state has for far too long exploited incarcerated fire crews, putting them in harm's way with little opportunity for stable employment upon release. Expanding meaningful, stable employment opportunities is necessary to improve reentry outcomes.

SB 1012 will support equitable and sustainable pathways for incarcerated individuals to access union-affiliated skilled trades careers by ensuring that successful completion of the CA Conservation (Fire) Camp Program results in clear eligibility and streamlined admission into state-approved apprenticeships after release.”

### **3. Proponent Arguments:**

According to the California State Council of Laborers, co-sponsors of this bill:

“This critical legislation addresses a long-standing inequity by ensuring that the sacrifice and skilled training of incarcerated fire camp participants are recognized as the professional assets they truly are. Successful reentry into society after incarceration remains a significant challenge, as formerly incarcerated individuals often face systemic barriers to sustainable, long-term careers. Despite past investments, the state has for far too long exploited incarcerated fire camp participants, putting them in harm's way with little opportunity for stable employment upon release.

California has made significant investments in rehabilitation and post-release employment outcomes. These include pre-apprenticeship programs such as the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program, which allow incarcerated individuals to complete industry-recognized training and education to prepare for registered apprenticeships upon release. Like pre-apprenticeship programs, the California Conservation (Fire) Camp program also provides incarcerated individuals with extensive training and real work experiences, such as responding to wildfires and performing critical vegetation and forestry management work.

The state has relied on the courage of incarcerated individuals to battle our most devastating wildfires-most recently deploying over 1,000 as first responders during the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires-only for them to face systemic barriers to those same careers upon release. These individuals perform grueling, dangerous work in vegetation management, emergency response, and hazardous waste clean-up-skills that are directly applicable to our organization and other union-affiliated crafts.

The Laborers are not just supporters of this movement; we are leaders in this space. We have long been firm believers in second chances, understanding that providing opportunities to those affected by the criminal justice system is what builds a strong community. By championing SB 1012, we are formalizing our commitment to transforming ‘hard time’ into ‘career time.’”

### **4. Opponent Arguments:**

None received.

**5. Dual Referral:**

The Senate Rules Committee referred this bill to the Senate Public Safety Committee, where it passed with a vote of 6-0, and the Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee.

**6. Prior/Related Legislation:**

SB 75 (Smallwood-Cuevas, 2025) would have required the CDCR, in partnership with DIR and recognized building and construction trades councils to establish the Pre-apprenticeship Pathways to Employment Pilot Program to provide incarcerated individuals with access to pre-apprenticeship training aligned with state-registered apprenticeships in the building and construction trades, no later than January 1, 2028. *This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.*

AB 247 (Bryan, Chapter 681, Statutes of 2025) requires 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.

SB 423 (Smallwood-Cuevas, 2025) would have required the CDCR and the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to expand access to community college courses that lead to degrees or certificates in fire science, forestry, basic emergency medical technician, or related subjects; requires CAL FIRE in collaboration with the California Conservation Corps and CDCR, and upon an appropriation, to (2) operate an enhanced firefighter training and certification program; and (3) authorizes the Los Angeles County Fire Department, upon an appropriation, to establish the Local Handcrew Pilot Program. *This bill was gutted and amended into a new bill with unrelated provisions.*

AB 1380 (Elhawary, 2025) would have directed CAL FIRE 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; required CDCR 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. *This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 2147 (Reyes, Chapter 60, Statutes of 2020), allows a person who has successfully participated in the California Conservation Camp Program or in a county incarcerated individual hand crew to petition for expungement of their conviction

SB 866 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 53, Statutes of 2018) which among other things, establishes the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certification Program to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for inmates upon release. The bill requires CDCR to establish a joint advisory committee, composed of representatives from specified organizations and state agencies, for the purpose of implementation of the program and specified the duties of the committee with respect to the program.

SB 835 (Beall, 2018) would have required the CDCR to develop guidelines for inmate participation in pre-apprenticeship training programs, as specified, and would have required CDCR to coordinate with local state-approved apprenticeship programs and local building

trade councils so that inmates who complete an inmate pre-apprenticeship program have a pathway to employment upon release. *This bill died in the Senate Public Safety Committee.*

**SUPPORT**

California State Council of Laborers (Co-Sponsor)  
NextGen California (Co-Sponsor)  
ACLU California Action  
Associated General Contractors, California Chapters  
California Federation of Labor Unions  
California Public Defenders Association

**OPPOSITION**

None received

**-- END --**