

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
SB 1012 (Smallwood-Cuevas) – As Amended May 14, 2026

Policy Committee:	Public Safety	Vote:	9 - 0
	Labor and Employment		7 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill creates a pathway for graduates of the California Conservation Camp program to enter state-approved apprenticeships in the building and construction trades.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the joint advisory committee of the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program, in consultation with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), and the Conservation Camp program, to facilitate the post-release admission of camp graduates into state-approved apprenticeship programs.
- 2) Requires camp graduates to be evaluated for advanced standing in an apprenticeship based on prior coursework and work experience.
- 3) Provides that successful completion of the Conservation Camp program constitutes qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship in the building and construction trades.
- 4) Requires CDCR, in partnership with CAL FIRE, to ensure all individuals who complete the program receive a certification acknowledging their fire camp training and work experience.
- 5) Defines program graduates as individuals who participated as incarcerated hand crew members.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Significant annual costs to CDCR for workload associated with program development and expansion, interdepartmental coordination, and the validation and tracking of training skills and competencies (General Fund), to the extent this bill results in new or expanded requirements related to the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program.
- 2) The Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS), within DIR, estimates a fiscal impact of \$450,000 in the first year and \$400,000 for the second and third year (Apprenticeship Training Contribution Fund), to evaluate camp graduates for advanced standing against approved apprenticeship standards and to communicate the bill's qualifying-experience designation to sponsoring committees. DAS has advised that the bill does not make clear whether the qualifying-experience provision substitutes for pre-apprenticeship completion in

a sponsoring committee's admissions decision or only counts toward advanced standing after admission, and the broader reading may not be captured in the estimate.

- 3) Costs of an unknown amount, likely minor, to CAL FIRE and DIR to participate in the joint advisory committee to facilitate the admission of program graduates into apprenticeship programs (special funds, General Fund).

COMMENTS:

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

SB 1012 recognizes the tremendous skill and sacrifice of incarcerated individuals who serve in the California Conservation Fire Camp program by ensuring they have access to equitable pathways that lead to real opportunities upon release... In doing so, this bill helps address critical public safety workforce needs, reduces recidivism, and creates pathways to meaningful careers.

- 2) **Background. *Apprenticeship and Pre-apprenticeship.*** In 2018, SB 866 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 53, Statutes of 2018, established the Pre-Release Construction Trades Certificate Program in CDCR to increase employment opportunities in the construction trades for incarcerated individuals upon release. The program is overseen by a joint advisory committee composed of representatives from the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California and similar organizations, joint apprenticeship training programs, the California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority, DAS and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency. Among other responsibilities, the committee develops guidelines for participation in pre-apprenticeship training programs, implements a prerelease construction trades certification validating completed instruction and competencies, and facilitates the admission of graduates of inmate pre-apprenticeship programs into state-approved apprenticeship programs.

A state-approved apprenticeship combines classroom instruction with paid on-the-job training under standards administered by DAS. Pre-apprenticeship is a distinct, preparatory step designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in registered apprenticeship programs, and requires a documented partnership with at least one registered apprenticeship sponsor. The relevant curriculum is the multicraft core curriculum (MC3), a 120-hour program covering orientation to apprenticeships, introduction to the construction industry, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid, an Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification, applied construction mathematics, and blueprint reading. Existing law requires the joint advisory committee to integrate MC3 into all inmate pre-apprenticeship training programs in the building and construction trades.

California Conservation Camp. CDCR, in cooperation with CAL FIRE and the Los Angeles County Fire Department, jointly operates 35 conservation camps in 25 counties. Camp participation is voluntary and limited to individuals with minimum custody status, with specified convictions disqualifying. Participants receive the same entry-level training as CAL FIRE's seasonal firefighters along with ongoing training throughout the program, must complete CAL FIRE's Firefighting Training Program, and become certified wildland firefighters upon completion. Crews are deployed as hand crews under the supervision of a

CAL FIRE captain. According to the author, over 1,000 incarcerated individuals were deployed as first responders during the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires.

This bill extends the joint advisory committee's facilitation responsibility to conservation camp graduates, makes camp completion qualifying experience for a state-approved apprenticeship, and requires a certification documenting camp training and work experience. Conservation camp training, however, is wildland firefighting rather than construction trades instruction, and camp participants do not complete MC3. DAS reports it is unable to determine whether the bill's qualifying experience provision is intended to substitute for pre-apprenticeship completion in a sponsoring committee's admissions decision, or only to count toward advanced standing once an applicant has been admitted. Those two readings carry substantially different implications for how the pathway would operate and for what the state would need to provide to make the pathway function.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 2483 (Elhawary) requires CAL FIRE to implement a standardized process ensuring any individual who completes training in a CAL FIRE firefighting training camp while incarcerated receives official written certification before release, and to award hiring preferences to certain qualified formerly incarcerated individuals. AB 2483 is pending in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1380 (Elhawary) requires CAL FIRE to provide official certification for all individuals who complete firefighting training while incarcerated. AB 1380 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.

SB 75 (Smallwood-Cuevas) requires CDCR to establish a pre-apprenticeship pilot program aligned with state-registered apprenticeships in the building and construction trades by January 1, 2028. Governor Newsom vetoed SB 75, stating the bill would establish a structure that could not be implemented, conflicted with existing work, and created cost pressures exceeding several million dollars annually.

4) **Prior Legislation.**

AB 247 (Bryan), Chapter 681, Statutes of 2025, requires incarcerated hand crew members to be paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 while assigned to an active fire incident.

AB 409 (Weber), of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, would have required CDCR to modify hand crew training to allow participants to earn specified firefighting certifications. AB 409 did not receive a hearing in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.

AB 1908 (Maienschein), of the 2021-2022 Legislative Session, would have made an incarcerated individual who completed hand crew training eligible for a firefighter certificate provided by CDCR. The hearing on AB 1908 was canceled at the author's request.

AB 2147 (Reyes), Chapter 60, Statutes of 2020, established an expedited expungement pathway for individuals who successfully participated in the California Conservation Camp Program or a county hand crew.

SB 245 (Reyes), Chapter 746, Statutes of 2025, requires CDCR or a county authority, upon release of a defendant who successfully participated in an inmate fire crew, to certify that participation to the sentencing court and to provide a copy to the defendant.

Analysis Prepared by: Shiran Zohar / APPR. / (916) 319-2081