

Date of Hearing: July 16, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 551 (Cortese) – As Amended June 10, 2025

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 7 - 2

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill codifies the Legislature’s intent that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) integrate the principles of normalization and dynamic security to create safer conditions for incarcerated people and correctional staff.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Includes findings and declarations about, among other topics, the role of dynamic security in maintaining a safe prison environment, the role of normalization in preparing incarcerated people for reintegration into society upon their release from prison, and the importance of effective rehabilitation to public safety.
- 2) States the Legislature recognizes that life in prison can never be the same as life in a free society, but that active steps should be taken to make conditions in prison as close to normal life as possible, aside from loss of liberty, and to ensure that this normalization does not lead to inhumane prison conditions.
- 3) States it is the intent of the Legislature that CDCR integrate, to the extent possible, the principles of normalization and dynamic security to establish safer conditions for incarcerated persons, correctional officers, and prison staff.
- 4) Requires CDCR to maintain a mission statement consistent with the principles of normalization and dynamic security and to facilitate access for community-based programs.
- 5) States CDCR should develop training for all correctional staff on the principles of normalization and dynamic security to meaningfully effectuate the principles in the bill.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Cost pressures (General Fund) of an unknown but potentially significant amount to CDCR. CDCR reports no significant fiscal impact resulting from the bill; the department believes its existing staff trainings fulfill its obligations under the bill and reports it already “works to remove barriers to accessing rehabilitative programming through the use dynamic security and strives to create institutional conditions that closely resemble life in the community.” However, to the extent CDCR must change its facilities, practices, and policies to meet the goals of normalization and dynamic security codified by this bill, the department will likely incur significant future costs given the scope of its operations.

COMMENTS:

In 2023, Governor Newsom unveiled the “California Model” of incarceration and rehabilitation. According to CDCR, the California Model is a collection of international best practices based on four “foundational pillars” that promote the well-being of incarcerated people and prison staff: dynamic security, normalization, peer mentorship, and becoming a trauma-informed organization. This bill focuses primarily on dynamic security and normalization.

Dynamic security is an approach to institutional security that relies on professional and positive relationships between prison staff and incarcerated people. Under this approach, personal relationships between staff and incarcerated people promote information-sharing and help resolve conflicts before they escalate. A correctional officer who knows the incarcerated people on the yard or housing unit where they work can better identify behavioral changes and security threats. Incarcerated people may be more comfortable sharing concerns and simmering problems with a correctional officer with whom they have a positive rapport.

Normalization is the idea that – aside from necessary security measures and separation from the outside community – daily life during incarceration should closely mirror daily life in the community. Most people incarcerated in California’s prisons will ultimately be released back into the community. Proponents of normalization believe it makes an incarcerated person’s reintegration into society easier because the contrast between incarceration and the community is not as stark as in traditional prison environments. Normalization can include job assignments that are similar to work opportunities in the community, housing facilities that provide more privacy than prison dorms or cell blocks, permitting incarcerated people to wear street clothes instead of prison uniforms, or providing incarcerated people with more choices about the food they eat.

Dynamic security and normalization are integrated into the northern European methods of incarceration that have served as models for other countries and California in recent years. These approaches are a significant departure from the traditional model of incarceration, which has instead emphasized physical and procedural security, environmental control, and impersonal interactions between prison staff and incarcerated people. Proponents of dynamic security and normalization argue they make prisons safer and more pleasant work environments for prison staff, in addition to providing benefits for incarcerated people and for public safety at large when people are released from prison.

As described in more detail in the analysis of this bill by the Assembly Committee on Public Safety, CDCR has already taken steps to incorporate the pillars of the California Model into the department’s operations. Additionally, the 2025-26 state budget includes significant appropriations that support integration of these principles at the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center (formerly known as San Quentin State Prison), including \$7.8 million General Fund in fiscal year (FY) 2025-26 and \$13 million in 2026-27 and ongoing for increased staffing and to add and expand rehabilitative programs, professional development, and dynamic security elements. The budget also includes \$1.6 million one-time General Fund in FY 2025-26 to renovate San Quentin’s death row housing facility to instead accommodate lower security honor dorm housing. To the extent this bill prompts CDCR to make similar changes in its other prisons and facilities to further incorporate principles of dynamic security and normalization, the bill will result in significant cost pressures to the department.