
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 551
Author: Cortese (D), et al.
Amended: 6/10/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE: 5-1, 4/22/25
AYES: Arreguín, Caballero, Gonzalez, Pérez, Wiener
NOES: Seyarto

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

SENATE FLOOR: 28-10, 5/28/25
AYES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Laird, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NOES: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Dahle, Grove, Jones, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Seyarto, Strickland, Valladares
NO VOTE RECORDED: Limón, Reyes

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 57-20, 9/3/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Corrections and rehabilitation: state policy

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: 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.

Assembly Amendments 6/10/25 move several of the provisions of this bill to a new Penal Code section.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Declares that California must reinvest its criminal justice resources to support community-based corrections programs and evidence-based practices that will achieve improved public safety returns on this state's substantial investment in its criminal justice system. (Penal (Pen.) Code, § 17.5, subd. (a)(4).)
- 2) Declares that strategies supporting reentering offenders, such as standardized risk and needs assessments, transitional housing, treatment, medical and mental health services, and employment, have been demonstrated to significantly reduce recidivism among offenders in other states. (Pen. Code, § 17.7, subd. (a).)
- 3) Finds and declares that the purpose of sentencing is public safety, which is achieved through punishment, rehabilitation, and restorative justice. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(1).)
- 4) States that when a sentence includes incarceration, the deprivation of liberty satisfies the punishment purpose of sentencing. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(1).)
- 5) States that the purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation and successful community reintegration achieved through education, treatment, and active participation in rehabilitative and restorative justice programs. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(1).)
- 6) Finds and declares that programs should be available for incarcerated persons, including, but not limited to, educational, rehabilitative, and restorative justice programs that are designed to promote behavioral change and to prepare all incarcerated persons for successful reentry into the community. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(2).)
- 7) Encourages CDCR to allow all incarcerated persons the opportunity to enroll in programs that promote successful return to the community. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(2).)
- 8) Directs CDCR to maintain a mission statement consistent with these principles and shall facilitate access for community-based programs in order to meaningfully effectuate these principles. (Pen. Code, § 1170, subd. (a)(2).)
- 9) 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. (Pen. Code, § 5000, subd. (b).)

This bill:

- 1) Finds and declares that an additional purpose of criminal sentencing is to reduce recidivism.
- 2) States that the Legislature recognizes the principle of normalization, which states that life inside prison should be as close to life outside of prison as much as possible, and prepares incarcerated persons to be productive and contributing members of society upon their release.
- 3) States that while the Legislature recognizes that life in prison can never be the same as life in a free society, 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.
- 4) States that the Legislature also recognizes that the principle of dynamic security promotes a healthier environment for correctional officers, staff, and individuals within a correction facility by improving the relationship between incarcerated individuals and staff.
- 5) States that rehabilitative programs, activities, and services should be delivered in line with the individual treatment needs of incarcerated persons.
- 6) Directs CDCR to maintain a mission statement consistent with the principles of normalization and dynamic security.
- 7) States that CDCR should develop training for all correctional staff on the principles of normalization and dynamic security.
- 8) States that another primary objective of adult incarceration at CDCR is to promote personal growth for all residents.
- 9) Contains other legislative findings and declarations.

Background

The California Model. In March 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom announced a historic commitment to safety and justice, “the California Model,” to include the transformation of the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center. In April 2023, the Secretary of CDCR and the federal Receiver who oversees prison medical care issued a joint memorandum expressing their concern that prison environments can be unfavorable to the health and well-being of the people who live and work in them and operate at cross purposes to rehabilitative efforts. A multi-disciplinary Advisory Council was tasked with drafting and presenting recommendations to achieve cultural and transformational change within the prison and help inform CDCR’s California Model.

Working with these multidisciplinary experts and drawing from international best practices, CDCR has since begun implementing the California Model to transform the experience of living and working in CDCR facilities. The California Model is based on four foundational pillars meant to improve the health and well-being of people who live and work within CDCR institutions: dynamic security, normalization, peer-mentorship, and becoming a trauma-informed organization. Dynamic security is an approach that promotes positive relationships between staff and incarcerated people accomplished through purposeful activities and professional, positive, and respectful communication. Normalization aims to bring life in prison as close as possible to life outside of prison because the more life in prison resembles life in the community, the easier it will be for people to transition and adjust to life in the community upon release. Peer mentorship seeks to train incarcerated individuals to use their lived experiences to mentor and support their peers. And the goal of becoming a trauma informed organization is to educate staff at all levels to recognize the impacts of trauma to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all staff and incarcerated individuals. CDCR has partnered with the University of California San Francisco Amend program to transform correctional culture. This has included sending prison leadership, California policy makers, other government officials, and advocates to Norway’s prisons to study how their approach to normalcy and dynamic security in corrections is lowering recidivism and expanding employee wellness.

This bill focuses on two of the California Model pillars, normalization and dynamic security. This bill would recognize and codify these principles. This bill directs CDCR to include the principles of normalization and

dynamic security in its mission statement. This bill would also direct CDCR to develop training for all correctional staff to teach these principles.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

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.

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/02/2025)

Amnesty International USA
California Public Defenders Association
Carry the Vision
Center for Employment Opportunities
Courage California
Creative Acts
Defy Ventures
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Felony Murder Elimination Project
Grip Training Institute
Initiate Justice
Initiate Justice Action
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
Oakland Privacy
Opportunities for Change
Prison From-theinside-out, INC.
San Francisco Public Defender
Smart Justice California
The Place4grace
Transformative Programming Works
Valor US

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/02/2025)

California Civil Liberties Advocacy

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:

The Transformative Programming Works (TPW) writes:

TPW represents over 100 organizations that provide rehabilitative in-prison programs in all of CDCR's prisons. TPW believes that the purpose of incarceration should be to provide rehabilitative services to incarcerated people so they can be successfully and safely reintegrated into the community.

National research shows the average life expectancy of correctional officers is 59 years old, 16 years shorter than those not working in corrections. Additionally, suicide rates of correctional officers are 39% higher than the national working age population. Among incarcerated individuals, every year of imprisonment decreases their life expectancy by two years. Further, in 2022, the suicide rate of incarcerated people increased 4.6 points.

SB 551 introduces the principles of Normality and Dynamic Security to CDCR. Normality not only emulates life outside of a facility on the inside, in the most secure manner possible, but prepares individuals for adequate civic engagement. Moreover, Dynamic Security creates a healthier prison environment through the use of ongoing, respectful communication between staff and residents—reducing the risk of stress, violence, and recidivism for greater public safety.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:

According to California Civil Liberties Advocacy:

We respectfully object to one particular policy statement found in both the legislative findings and amended Penal Code §1170(a)(1), which reads:

“Active steps should be taken to make conditions in prison as close to normal life as possible, aside from loss of liberty.”

This sentence, in our view, is vague, overbroad, and utopian in character. While well-meaning, it lacks definitional guardrails and measurable standards, leaving open a wide range of interpretations. The phrase “as close to normal life as possible” really is begging the question since the metric by which a “normal life” may be very different, depending on a person’s individual background, economic status, housing, employment, geographical location, and et cetera.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 57-20, 9/3/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Ahrens, Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

NO VOTE RECORDED: Bains, Valencia

Prepared by: Sandy Uribe / PUB. S. /
9/3/25 18:38:14

**** END ****