



# AB 247 – Increased Wages for Incarcerated People Fighting Wildfires

## SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 247 will ensure incarcerated hand crew members who are actively fighting fires receive fair compensation for their invaluable service during devastating fires.

## BACKGROUND

Incarcerated people have long been a part of our state’s firefighting force. In 1915, CDCR created a Conservation Camp Program that allows incarcerated people to be trained to fight fires throughout California’s notorious and devastating fire seasons. Today, there are 35 conservation camps in the state. Currently, the percentage of incarcerated people in these camps makes up around 10-15% of the crews. There are only 1,100 incarcerated individuals staffing the camps across the state.

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Governor Newsom declared a State of Emergency as the Palisades fire raged through West Los Angeles. Soon after, the Eaton fire erupted in Altadena. Cal Fire designated the Eaton and the Palisades Fire as the second and third most destructive wildfires in state history, respectively.

In 2018, the largest wildfire in California history - the Camp Fire - had close to 800 incarcerated individuals assisted with the Camp Fire in the County of Butte.

California has made some progress in removing barriers for incarcerated people to become certified as a firefighter after being released from incarceration. In 2020, AB 2147 allowed a person who served as an incarcerated fire-fighting crew member to be eligible to apply for record expungement upon release from custody. If the expungement is approved, they can get careers requiring a state license.

## PROBLEM

Incarcerated people who bravely step forward to fight our state's wildfires are grossly underpaid. They currently receive a mere \$5 to \$10 per day. Even with the additional one dollar per hour provided by CalFIRE while actively fighting fires, their work is still not recognized and compensated justly considering their heroic work.

A 2018 report discovered that incarcerated hand crew members were more than eight times as likely to be injured after inhaling smoke and particulates compared with other firefighters. Additionally, they were four times more likely to experience object-induced injuries, such as cuts, bruises, dislocations, and fractures, compared with non-incarcerated firefighters working on the same fires. Unfortunately, these injuries can be fatal. From early 2017 to late 2018, three incarcerated hand crew members died on duty.

## SOLUTION

AB 247 will provide incarcerated hand crew members with \$19 an hour for the hours worked when they are actively fighting fires.

This bill is about more than fair pay – it is about dignity, equity, and recognition. These people put their lives on the line to protect our communities, and it is only right that they are compensated justly for their sacrifice and service.

## SUPPORT

- Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) (Co-Sponsors)
- Initiate Justice (IJ) (Co-Sponsors)
- Initiate Justice Action (Co-Sponsors)
- One Fair Wage (OFW) (Co-Sponsors)
- Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (Co-Sponsors)
- Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (ABMoC)

All of Us or None  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern  
California (AJSOCAL)  
Boundless Freedom  
Black Leadership Council  
Beauty Behind Bars  
Californians for Safety and Justice  
California Public Defenders Association  
California Innocence Coalition  
Children's Defense Fund  
Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice  
Coalition for Just and Equitable California  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Ella Baker Center  
East Bay Community Law Center  
Fair Chance Project  
Families United to End LWOP (FUEL)  
Jewish Center for Justice  
Jesse's Place Organization  
La Defensa  
Land Together  
Prosecutor's Alliance  
Prosecutor's Alliance Action  
Restoring Hope California  
RYSE Center  
Smart Justice  
San Francisco Public Defender's Office  
Silicon Valley De-Bug  
The Justice Education Center, Pitzer College  
Team Justice San Diego  
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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