

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 23, 2025

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 5, 2025

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 26, 2025

SENATE BILL

No. 423

Introduced by Senator Smallwood-Cuevas

February 18, 2025

An act to add Section 84810.8 to the Education Code, and to add Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 4970) and Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 4980) to Part 4 of Division 4 of the Public Resources Code, relating to inmate firefighters.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 423, as amended, Smallwood-Cuevas. Inmate firefighters: postsecondary education: enhanced firefighter training and certification program: local handcrew pilot program.

Existing law establishes the California Community Colleges under the administration of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. Under existing law, the board of governors appoints a chief executive officer, who is known as the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. Existing law requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to enter into an interagency agreement to expand access to community college courses that lead to degrees or certificates that result in enhanced workforce skills or transfer to a 4-year university.

This bill would require, on or before January 1, 2028, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to expand access to community

college courses that lead to degrees and certificates in specified subjects including, among other subjects, fire science, for individuals serving in California Conservation Corps handcrews or institutional firehouses, as provided.

Existing law establishes in the Natural Resources Agency the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and requires the department to be responsible for, among other things, fire protection and prevention, as provided. Existing law establishes the California Conservation Corps and requires the corps to implement and administer various training and educational programs, including the California Conservation Camp program. Under existing law, incarcerated persons in the California Conservation Camp program work on projects supervised by the department. Existing law requires the department to use incarcerated persons assigned to conservation camps in performing fire prevention, fire control, and other work at the department.

This bill would ~~require~~ *require, upon appropriation by the Legislature,* the department, in collaboration with the California Conservation Corps and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, to operate an enhanced firefighter training and certification program at the Ventura Training Center in the County of Ventura, or its successor ~~facility, and would also require, upon appropriation of the Legislature, the operation of an enhanced firefighter training and certification program at a facility in the northern region of the state.~~ *facility.*

The bill would authorize, upon appropriation by the Legislature, the fire chief of the County of Los Angeles Fire Department to establish the Local Handcrew Pilot Program for 5 years and would authorize the fire chief to enroll in the pilot program formerly incarcerated individuals who have successfully completed specified programs, training, or work. The bill would require the fire chief to develop metrics for evaluating the efficacy and success of the pilot program, to evaluate the efficacy and success of the pilot program using those metrics, and to report the findings of the evaluation to the Legislature and the Governor, as provided.

This bill would make legislative findings and declarations as to the necessity of a special statute for the Ventura Training Center in the County of Ventura.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:

3 (1) Incarcerated individuals trained in handcrews and firefighting
4 serve a crucial role in protecting communities from wildfires and
5 other emergencies.

6 (2) A cohesive education and career training system reduces
7 recidivism, strengthens public safety, and creates a more equitable
8 and sustainable employment pathway for those who have served
9 the public on incarcerated handcrews or in institutional firehouses.

10 (3) The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the
11 office of the Chancellor of *the* California Community Colleges
12 have established workforce development programs to provide
13 education, job training, and rehabilitative services for incarcerated
14 and formerly incarcerated individuals.

15 (b) It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to build upon and
16 strengthen the state's current workforce development framework
17 for incarcerated handcrew or institutional firehouse members in
18 custody and postrelease.

19 SEC. 2. Section 84810.8 is added to the Education Code, to
20 read:

21 84810.8. (a) On or before January 1, 2028, the Department of
22 Corrections and Rehabilitation and the office of the Chancellor of
23 the California Community Colleges shall expand access to
24 community college courses that lead to degrees or certificates in
25 fire science, forestry, basic emergency medical technician, or
26 related subjects, including, but not limited to, incident command
27 systems and fire line leadership, for individuals serving in
28 Conservation Camp handcrews or institutional firehouses through
29 the Rising Scholars Network established pursuant to Section 78071
30 or similar programs supporting postsecondary education in prisons.

31 (b) The educational content described in subdivision (a) may
32 be delivered by the community colleges.

33 (c) If the educational content described in subdivision (a) is not
34 delivered by community colleges, the Department of Corrections
35 and Rehabilitation may contract with private postsecondary
36 educational institutions accredited by the Western Association of
37 Schools and Colleges or private nonprofit organizations that qualify
38 under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and

1 are otherwise accredited or licensed to deliver the educational
2 content.

3 SEC. 3. Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 4970) is added
4 to Part 4 of Division 4 of the Public Resources Code, to read:

5
6 CHAPTER 3. ENHANCED FIREFIGHTER TRAINING AND
7 CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
8

9 4970. (a) The department, in collaboration with the California
10 Conservation Corps and the Department of Corrections and
11 Rehabilitation, shall operate an enhanced firefighter training and
12 certification program at the Ventura Training Center in the County
13 of Ventura, or a successor facility in the southern region of the
14 state.

15 (b) *The department may contract with private postsecondary*
16 *educational institutions accredited by the Western Association of*
17 *Schools and Colleges or private nonprofit organizations that*
18 *qualify under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue*
19 *Code and are otherwise accredited or licensed to deliver the*
20 *content of the program established pursuant to this chapter.*

21 (c) *This section shall become operative only upon an*
22 *appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes in the annual*
23 *Budget Act or another statute.*

24 ~~4971. (a) The department, in collaboration with the California~~
25 ~~Conservation Corps and the Department of Corrections and~~
26 ~~Rehabilitation, shall operate an enhanced firefighter training and~~
27 ~~certification program at a facility in the northern region of the~~
28 ~~state.~~

29 ~~(b) The department may contract with private postsecondary~~
30 ~~educational institutions accredited by the Western Association of~~
31 ~~Schools and Colleges or private nonprofit organizations that qualify~~
32 ~~under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and~~
33 ~~are otherwise accredited or licensed to deliver the content of the~~
34 ~~program established pursuant to this chapter.~~

35 ~~(c) This section shall become operative only upon an~~
36 ~~appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes in the annual~~
37 ~~Budget Act or another statute.~~

38 ~~4972.—~~

1 4971. The program established pursuant to this chapter shall
2 not replace or restrict existing or future programs and training
3 offered to formerly incarcerated individuals.

4 SEC. 4. Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 4980) is added
5 to Part 4 of Division 4 of the Public Resources Code, to read:

6
7 CHAPTER 4. LOCAL HANDCREW PILOT PROGRAM
8

9 4980. For ~~purposes~~ *the purpose* of this ~~chapter~~ *chapter*, the
10 following definitions apply:

11 (a) “Fire chief” means the fire chief of the County of Los
12 Angeles Fire Department.

13 (b) “Program” means the Local Handcrew Pilot Program.

14 4981. (a) The fire chief may, in collaboration with an
15 authorized employee representative of the County of Los Angeles
16 Fire Department, establish the Local Handcrew Pilot Program.
17 The program shall operate for five years.

18 (b) The fire chief may enroll in the program formerly
19 incarcerated individuals who have successfully completed one or
20 more of the following:

- 21 (1) The California Conservation Camp program crew.
22 (2) Relevant programming at Camp David ~~Gonzalez~~. *Gonzales*.
23 (3) Training at the enhanced firefighter training and certification
24 program established pursuant to Chapter 3 (commencing with
25 Section 4970).

26 (4) Work at an institutional firehouse.

27 (c) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), the fire chief may end the
28 program before it has operated for five years.

29 4982. (a) If the fire chief establishes the program pursuant to
30 Section 4981, the fire chief shall do all of the following:

31 (1) Develop metrics for evaluating the efficacy and success of
32 the program.

33 (2) Evaluate the efficacy and success of the program using the
34 metrics developed pursuant to paragraph (1).

35 (3) (A) Report the findings of the evaluation to the Legislature
36 and the Governor.

37 (B) The fire chief shall submit the report described in this
38 paragraph within 42 months of establishing the program and upon
39 conclusion of the program.

1 (b) If the fire chief ceases program operations pursuant to
2 subdivision (c) of Section 4981, the fire chief shall submit a report
3 to the Legislature and the Governor explaining the reasons for
4 ceasing operation of the program based on the metrics developed
5 pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (a).

6 (c) A report submitted to the Legislature pursuant to this section
7 shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the
8 Government Code.

9 4983. The program established pursuant to this chapter shall
10 not replace or restrict existing or future programs and training
11 offered to formerly incarcerated individuals, nor displace, replace,
12 or reduce currently employed firefighters, handcrew personnel, or
13 other existing positions in the County of Los Angeles Fire
14 Department.

15 4984. This chapter shall become operative only upon an
16 appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes in the annual
17 Budget Act or another statute.

18 SEC. 5. The Legislature finds and declares that a special statute
19 is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable
20 within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California
21 Constitution because, following an appropriation by the Legislature
22 in the Budget Act of 2018, the Ventura Training Center has built
23 a successful postrelease rehabilitation program for formerly
24 incarcerated handcrew members that has reduced recidivism and
25 provided important reentry support services to formerly
26 incarcerated individuals, and over 400 candidates have enrolled
27 in the program with over 250 of them securing jobs in the fire
28 service.