

AB 512 (Stone)

Program Credit Incentives for Prisoners

SUMMARY

This bill helps reduce recidivism and prison facility overcrowding by providing incentives for eligible prisoners to participate in certain educational and life skills programs while earning modest time reductions off their sentences.

Specifically, AB 512 increases the amount of time that a prisoner can earn to reduce his or her sentence from a maximum of six weeks off per year to a maximum of eighteen weeks off per year. The measure does not mandate the creation of new programs; instead, it encourages more incarcerated people to participate in programs to earn credits of up to eighteen weeks per year off their sentences.

EXISTING LAW

To address the high rate of recidivism and to meet the ongoing goal to reduce the prison population, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) offers rehabilitative programs that teach skills to help eligible prisoners transition back into the community. As an additional incentive for prisoners to participate, CDCR offers credits for the successful completion of these programs through achievable milestones, by which people in prison can earn the removal of specified amounts of time from the end of their prison sentences.

Eligible prisoners may earn up to six weeks per year off their sentences by successfully completing specific program performance objectives for approved rehabilitative programming credits.

Prisoners who are not eligible for credit earning under current law or under this bill include people in prison who have committed serious sex crimes, those serving life sentences without the possibility of parole, and those sentenced to death.

BACKGROUND

In spite of a recent reduction in the prison population due to realignment, California's prisons continue to be overcrowded, which compromises the safety of incarcerated people and prison staff and reduces the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts. As of February 2015, the California prison system was at 136.6% of design capacity. A contributing factor to the problem of prison overcrowding is that California prisons have a recidivism rate of 63.7%.

These Credit Earning programs have a proven track record of helping people released from prison stay out of trouble with the law. For instance, incarcerated people who completed the Substance Abuse Program training had a recidivism rate of less than half the statewide recidivism rate. Just 5.4% of prisoners who graduated from the Prison University Project, which provides higher education programs for San Quentin State Prison prisoners, returned to prison within one year. A comparable group of prisoners who did not enroll in the program had a one year recidivism rate of 21.2%. Other available credit earning programs include vocational training, academic training, and firefighting programs.

Credit earning programs are a key example of programs that the California Rehabilitation Oversight Board (CROB) has recommended expanding because they create "positive reinforcements for offenders who successfully complete their rehabilitation program requirements."

While most incarcerated people have a set release date or parole hearing, most will be released without having participated in evidence-based programming aimed at reducing their likelihood of recidivating. CDCR should provide additional incentives for prisoners to participate in credit earning rehabilitative programs in order to reduce the recidivism rate and help prisoners prepare for their lives post-release.

SUPPORT

Californian United for a Responsible Budget
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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