

January 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
Chair, Senate Committee on Public Safety  
State Capitol, Room 2031  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Concurrent Resolution 69 (Bradford) Dignity for Incarcerated Workers - SUPPORT

**Dear Chair Skinner,**

In recent years, firefighters in California have battled some of the most severe wildfires in the state's history. Fighting the deadly Camp Fire of 2018 alongside the civilian teams, were about 200 prisoners in California's Conservation Camp program<sup>1</sup>. Fighting wildfires is extraordinarily dangerous work. During the 2017 California wildfires, at least two prisoner firefighters died in work-related accidents<sup>2</sup>. Despite the dangers, prison firefighters earn only \$1.45 a day for their efforts.

California relies heavily on prison labor, but pays inmate fire crews and other incarcerated workers unfair and unjust wages. In California, over 42,000 people in prison work full-time, earning \$0.08 an hour – at most \$3.90 per day.<sup>3</sup> Low wages, combined with the required withholding of 55% of earnings to pay off criminal justice debt, means people leave prison financially unstable. This instability increases their dependence on state and local assistance programs and also heightens the risk of recidivating.

While prisoners protecting us from wildfires should certainly receive a reasonable wage for their courage and contributions, all incarcerated workers deserve the opportunity to earn a fair salary that will enable them to better prepare to support their families and successfully reintegrate into the community when they are released.

---

<sup>1</sup> Twitter, K. L. (2018, November 11). California is using inmate labor to fight its deadly wildfires. Retrieved from <https://thinkprogress.org/prison-labor-california-wildfires-0c40e2086ce1/>.

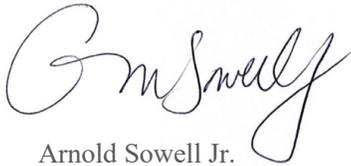
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> CDCR 2019 Operations Manual  
[https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult\\_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM%202019/2019-DOM.pdf](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/DOM/DOM%202019/2019-DOM.pdf).

SCR 69 (Bradford), acknowledges the need to increase the earnings of incarcerated people working for the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA), the Division of Juvenile Facilities, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to a livable wage. Raising these wages is necessary if we wish to see these individuals becoming independent, successful, and contributing members of society.

We strongly believe that all incarcerated workers should receive fair wages for their labor not only because research shows that even a \$0.50 raise can result in immensely favorable outcomes for prisoners, but also because it is the right thing to do<sup>4</sup>. NextGen California respectfully asks for you to join us in supporting this very important resolution.

Sincerely,



Arnold Sowell Jr.

Executive Director, NextGen California

---

<sup>4</sup> Agan, A. Y., & Makowsky, M. D. (2018, September 27). The Minimum Wage, EITC, and Criminal Recidivism. Retrieved January 7, 2020, from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25116>.