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AB-1668 California Conservation Corps: Education and Employment Reentry Program. (2019-2020)

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Assembly Bill No. 1668

CHAPTER 587

An act to add Chapter 4.5 (commencing with Section 14415) to Division 12 of the Public Resources Code, relating to resources conservation.

[Approved by Governor October 08, 2019. Filed with Secretary of State October 08, 2019.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1668, Carrillo. California Conservation Corps: Education and Employment Reentry Program.

Existing law establishes the California Conservation Corps and requires that young people participating in the corps program generally be engaged in projects that, among other things, preserve, maintain, and enhance environmentally important lands and waters. Existing law requires the director of the corps to establish a forestry corps program to accomplish certain objectives, including developing and implementing forest health projects, as provided, and establishing forestry corps crews.

Existing law establishes the California Conservation Camp program to provide for the training and use of inmates and wards assigned to conservation camps to perform public conservation projects, including, but not limited to, forest fire prevention and control, forest and watershed management, recreation, fish and game management, soil conservation, and forest and watershed revegetation.

This bill would authorize the director of the corps to establish the Education and Employment Reentry Program within the corps and to enroll in the program formerly incarcerated individuals who successfully served on a California Conservation Camp program crew and were recommended for participation as a program member by the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The bill would prescribe program enrollment terms, and would require the director of the corps, in conjunction with the Employment Development Department, to prioritize developing and executing plans to assist program members in obtaining continued employment following participation in the program. The bill would also establish program activities and objectives, including, among others, assisting with the forestry corps program objectives. The bill would authorize the corps, subject to the discretion and approval of the director of the corps, to enter into a planning agreement with certain entities to develop reentry and job training opportunities for the formerly incarcerated individuals described above who do not otherwise qualify for corps enrollment under corps policies. The bill would make implementation of the program contingent upon an appropriation being made in the annual Budget Act or another statute for its purposes.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Chapter 4.5 (commencing with Section 14415) is added to Division 12 of the Public Resources Code, to read:

CHAPTER 4.5. The Education and Employment Reentry Program

14415. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Conserving or developing natural resources and enhancing and maintaining environmentally important lands and waters is essential for protecting the state's environment, bolstering its economy, and providing safe and resilient communities for Californians to live in.

(2) The California Conservation Camp program operated jointly by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection provides work crews of incarcerated individuals to assist in all types of emergencies in support of the work of our frontline personnel during wildfires, floods, search and rescue, and earthquakes. When not assisting in emergencies, the crews participate in conservation and community service work projects for state, federal, and local government agencies.

(3) The corps is the oldest and largest state conservation corps in the nation that puts youth and the environment together to benefit both, tasking young people to protect and restore California's environment, respond to disasters, and become stronger workers, citizens, and individuals through their service.

(4) The corps offers a unique opportunity to form strategic partnerships to provide valuable job opportunities in resource conservation, resource management, fuels and vegetation management, and emergency incident mitigation for formerly incarcerated individuals who successfully served on a California Conservation Camp program crew.

(5) Building on their valuable experience in the California Conservation Camp program, a segment of former California Conservation Camp program participants may be available to support the federal, state, and local governments, local publicly owned electric utilities and electrical corporations, fire safe councils, and private landowners in helping California meet its aggressive goals to do all of the following:

(A) Proactively restore forest health to reduce greenhouse gases.

(B) Protect source watersheds from which the state's water supply originates.

(C) Promote the long-term storage of carbon in forest trees and soils.

(D) Minimize the loss of forest carbon from large, intense wildfires.

(E) Further the goals of the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (Division 25.5 (commencing with Section 38500) of the Health and Safety Code).

(6) Research demonstrates that formerly incarcerated individuals who have low performance, involvement, and satisfaction with school or work are more likely to recidivate than individuals who do not exhibit these characteristics. Research also shows that rehabilitation programs, including substance use disorder treatment and employment preparation, can be designed to address specific criminal risk factors.

(7) While participating in the corps, corpsmembers are offered life skills training, training in environmental awareness and civic responsibility, as well as reentry and counseling services, and gain access to high school courses through the corps' existing contracts and cooperation with high schools and community colleges.

(8) Drawing upon the expertise of the corps, collaborations and partnerships with workforce development programs and local and state agencies can be established to provide valuable job opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, consistent with the expertise of the corps to increase awareness of and improve our natural resources, instill basic skills and a healthy work ethic, build character, self-esteem, and self-discipline, establish a workforce with a strong sense of civic responsibility, and blend academic and growth opportunities in order to develop productive citizens who can make substantial contributions as California workers and citizens.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this chapter to serve the interests of all Californians by providing hope and opportunity for formerly incarcerated individuals by offering additional pathways to employment with a living wage in jobs that move the state forward on critical resource management objectives while providing those individuals the opportunity to make a difference for themselves and for the people of California.

14415.1. (a) The director may establish the Education and Employment Reentry Program within the corps and may enroll in the program formerly incarcerated individuals who successfully served on a California Conservation Camp program crew and were recommended for participation as a program member by the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection and the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

(b) For purposes of this chapter, "program" means the Education and Employment Reentry Program.

14415.2. (a) Persons described in Section 14415.1 shall be selected for participation as a program member on the basis of motivation, hard work, personal development, and public service, and without regard to their prior employment or educational background. Program member enrollment shall follow the same policies as corpsmember enrollment within the corps. Program enrollment shall be for a period of up to one year with the opportunity to extend program participation in accordance with corps policy. The director, in conjunction with the Employment Development Department, shall prioritize developing and executing plans to assist program members in obtaining continued employment following participation in the program. During participation in the program, program participants shall receive a stipend consistent with the current corpsmember pay system. Program participants shall also be eligible for benefits offered to all corpsmembers.

(b) Subject to the discretion and approval of the director, the corps may enter into a planning agreement with appropriate state and local agencies, including, but not limited to, local community conservation corps and organizations providing reentry and counseling services, to develop reentry and job training opportunities for individuals described in subdivision (a) of Section 14415.1 who do not otherwise qualify for corps enrollment under corps policies, such as age limitations. This subdivision does not require acceptance into the corps as a corpsmember of any individual over 25 years of age.

14415.3. Participants in the program shall generally be engaged in any of the following activities:

- (a) Natural resources or land management projects.
- (b) Fuels reduction and vegetation management projects.
- (c) Proactively restoring forest health to reduce greenhouse gases.
- (d) Conserving, maintaining, improving, and developing natural resources in both urban and rural areas.
- (e) Assisting in fire prevention and assisting in disaster operations.
- (f) Protecting source watersheds from which the state's water supply originates.
- (g) Promoting the long-term storage of carbon in forest trees and soils.
- (h) Minimizing the loss of forest carbon from large, intense wildfires.
- (i) Assisting departments within the Natural Resources Agency in developing, rehabilitating, and restoring parklands, recreational facilities, and historical resources.

14415.4. The program shall accomplish all of the following objectives:

- (a) Develop, partner with, and create opportunities for the forestry corps program objectives described in Section 14411.
- (b) Collaborate with the Employment Development Department to provide access to workforce services.
- (c) Collaborate with nongovernmental organizations dedicated to providing access to counseling, mentorship, supportive housing, health care, and educational opportunities.
- (d) Employ collaborations and partnerships available to the corps consistent with this division.

14415.5. The program established pursuant to this chapter shall not replace or restrict existing or future programs and training offered to formerly incarcerated individuals.

14415.6. Implementation of the program pursuant to this chapter is contingent upon an appropriation being made in the annual Budget Act or another statute for its purposes.