

Senate Bill 708

Fresh Start: Pre-Release Public Benefits Enrollment

Senator Nancy Skinner (SD 9)

THIS BILL

More and more California is working to shut the revolving prison door by strengthening re-entry support to inmates before they are released from state prison. SB 708 adds another tool to achieving that goal by enrolling eligible inmates into CalFresh, employment and other assistance prior to release.

ISSUE

California's state prisons and county jails currently have the responsibility to prepare people for being released back into society. Pre-enrolling individuals into social assistance programs assists this goal but California does not yet have full authority that would enable corrections officials to do so.

Federal law allows for pre-enrollment into CalFresh and SSI, but only when appropriate permission is secured from the federal administering agencies. Federal law also allows state prisons to assist people who are incarcerated to secure a copy of their Social Security card. To date, California has not yet sought this permission, making California one of only 11 states that does not have an MOU with the SSA. State law is currently silent on this topic.

AB 720 (Skinner, 2013) gave county jails the option to pre-enroll individuals into Medi-Cal. AB 2308 (Stone, 2014) made California's CAL-ID program mandatory for all individuals in state prison.

SB 708 would provide jails and prisons the authority to assist those being released acquire their Social Security card or apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Access to critical services prior to release will assist individuals successfully re-enter society and decrease the workload on county staff who administer safety net services.

SOLUTION

SB 708 seeks to reduce the risk of recidivism and contribute to successful re-entry by:

- Directing Department of Social Services to seek authority from U.S. Department of Agriculture to pre-enroll eligible inmates into CalFresh prior to release.
- Allowing California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to enter into a MOU with Social Security Administration so individuals can apply for a replacement Social Security card and Supplemental Security Income while awaiting release.

SUPPORT

County Welfare Directors Association (Co-Sponsor)
Ella Baker Center (Co-Sponsor)
L.A. Regional Reentry Partnership (Co-Sponsor)
Root & Rebound (Co-Sponsor)
Western Center on Law and Poverty (Co-Sponsor)
Californians United for a Responsible Budget

CONTACT

Priscilla Quiroz
Office of Senator Nancy Skinner
(916) 651-4009 | Priscilla.Quiroz@sen.ca.gov

Jessica Bartholow
Western Center on Law and Poverty
(916) 442-0753 | jbartholow@wclp.org