



SYDNEY K. KAMLAGER REPRESENTING SENATE DISTRICT 30



FACT SHEET: SB 1304 – CDCR Gate Money Allowance Increase

IN BRIEF

SB 1304 seeks to increase the amount of money the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) gives to people upon release from state prisons to \$2589. The current amount given is \$200 – an amount that has remained unadjusted for inflation since 1973. Increasing this allowance not only protects the safety of those newly released and facilitates a successful transition to life after prison, but ultimately increases public safety and decreases recidivism.

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

Currently, people released from California prisons receive \$200 in “gate money.” This money may be less depending on the manner of their release, length of their sentence, or need for clothing or transportation upon release (deducted from the \$200).

California hasn’t revisited this number in nearly 50 years, despite inflation and soaring housing prices. Housing prices in 1973 were significantly [lower](#), and this \$200 check could more than cover a month’s rent on a typical two-bedroom apartment. In 2022, \$200 barely [covers](#) any basic needs for released persons, and would cover less than 15% of one month’s rent on a typical studio apartment, let alone food and hygiene.

Several Federal and state government agencies have useful formulas for calculating living expenses. These include the [Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care](#), [Fair Market Rents](#) and the [Consumer Expenditure Survey](#), to name a few. The Department of Urban Studies and Planning at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has synthesized many of these formulas to create a model called the Living Wage Calculator. According to the calculator, typical monthly expenses for California in

2021 were around \$2590, pre-tax for a single adult with no children.

SOLUTION

SB 1304 would adjust the gate money allowance for inflation using MIT’s [Living Wage Calculator](#). SB 1304 would also compel CDCR to continue adjusting for inflation from 2024 onward.

While beneficial for all, increasing CDCR’s gate-money allowance is a particularly apt rehabilitative step for women, whose needs both during incarceration and post-release are unique to those of justice-involved men. Data from the Prison Policy Initiative shows that women experience [much higher rates of unemployment](#) and [homelessness](#), and are [less likely to have a high school education](#), compared to formerly incarcerated men.

One month is a reasonable amount of time for someone to locate a new job. While some may be able to organize job offers before they are released, this is not common, much less to be expected. What’s more, most employers do not begin dispersing paychecks until 1-2 pay periods (often 2-4 weeks) after employment begins. This is in addition to the post-release financial obligations many formerly incarcerated people face such as transportation to and from parole check-ins.

Providing gate money that is an appropriate reflection of typical expenses for Californians is critical for the success of this policy and the success of a rehabilitative prison system.

Beyond any realistic financial necessities, there is an obligation on the part of the state to ensure that people in their care are not released into circumstances where they are unable to meet their basic needs. Failure to do only serves to perpetuate economic violence against communities that have been historically subjected to cycles of incarceration and the collective trauma that comes with it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Balkis Awan

Balkis.Awan@sen.ca.gov or (916) 651-4030