



SENATOR
RICARDOLARA
LEGISLATIVE FACTSHEET

Resources for Exonerated People Fact Sheet
Senate Bill 1050

Summary:

SB 1050 provides critical services to exonerated people upon their release, including access to Medi-Cal, CalFresh, work training programs, and gate money. The bill also requires the Department of Justice to immediately update their database to reflect wrongful convictions.

Background:

According to research conducted by the University of California Irvine, and Michigan State University College of Law, there have been a total of 192 exonerations in California since the year 1989ⁱ. The vast majority of these wrongfully convicted individuals served time in state prison before their convictions were thrown out, collectively losing 1,574 years of their freedom. Every person wrongfully convicted and imprisoned lost an average of 9 years of their life, with some cases being as extreme as losing 34 years or more.

Problem:

Current law has established procedures and services for people upon their release from prison by parole or sentence completion in order to assist them as they transition back into society, including job training, employment, healthcare, and stable housing. However, exonerees do not receive the same level of support, including gate money and enrollment in Medi-Cal and CalFresh, making them extremely vulnerable to falling into poverty and homelessness upon their release.

The process by which exonerees are released is often abrupt and unexpected. Whereas people serving determinate sentences and parolees know the exact date of their release and are given resources weeks in advance, exonerated people are usually released with very little prior notice. The court can make a determination of innocence and order the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to release an exonerated person within the time span of a day. The Department has not established a process to enroll exonerees in the same level of services as parolees.

Exonerees also do not currently receive any gate money upon their release. The purpose of gate money is to help individuals immediately upon their release, whether it be to purchase a meal, a bus ticket home, or cover a couple nights in a hotel until they can get connected with friends, family, or support services. In California, people released from prison receive \$200 to help them get where they need to go. Exonerees, due to the fact that they are often released with very little notice and do not have time to plan, often face even greater hardship in finding a place to stay upon their release.

When applying for a job, exonerated people face further barriers when their records show a crime they did not commit. It can often be months or even years before an exonerated person has their records updated to reflect their wrongful conviction and release from prison.

Solution:

SB 1050 provides much needed resources to people who have been unjustly persecuted by our justice system and subsequently been found innocent. Exonerated people, due to the unique nature of their imprisonment and release, need and deserve comprehensive, tailored services and benefits.

SB 1050 will:

1. Ensure exonerees are enrolled in Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and work training programs upon their release;
2. Provide exonerees \$1000 gate money;
3. Streamline the process for exoneree records to be updated by the Department of Justice to reflect their wrongful convictions and remove a major barrier to finding employment.

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ⁱ From National Registry of Exonerations. Found at <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/Exonerations-in-the-United-States-Map.aspx>