

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/inmate-firefighters-blocked-from-firefighting-careers-after-prison/>

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11.19.18

Of some 9400 firefighters deployed to fight the Camp Fire in Northern California, about 1500 are incarcerated people. Six inmate firefighters have died since 1983, the *New York Times* [reports](#).

California has more inmate firefighters than any other state, with 3700 people working at 44 fire camps across the state. Men, women, and youths can volunteer for the program if they have five years or less remaining on their sentences and have not been convicted of rape or arson.

These roughly 4000 incarcerated men and women risk their lives fighting fires in California, only to find the profession closed to them when they are released from prison.

Volunteers can receive time off their sentences, but they are discouraged from applying for firefighter jobs after their release or find themselves barred from being firefighters because of their criminal records. Captain Tony Imbrenda of the Los Angeles County Fire Department told the *Times*, I can tell you that someone who has been incarcerated and part of an inmate hand crew has no chance of employment with this agency.

California lawmakers considered a [bill](#) this year that would have changed a state law that directs local E.M.S. agencies to deny an E.M.T. certification to people with certain criminal histories. Ultimately, a scaled-down version of the legislation passed, requiring the collection of data on these denials.

Last month, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition [launched](#) a Fire Training Camp program that it says is designed to creat[e] pathways into firefighting careers for the formerly incarcerated.

But in the meantime, despite the invaluable experience incarcerated Californians are gaining as they fight the deadliest and most destructive fire in state history, they have little hope of ever joining the ranks of professional firefighters.

Tags:

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As Inmates, They Fight Californias Fires. As Ex-Convicts, Their Firefighting Prospects Wilt.

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