

Will California End Involuntary Servitude?

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This practice is slavery by another name and is used to extract labor from the Golden State's 120,000+ prisoners

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, USA, June 28, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- June 29, 2022 - the California State Senate (senate.ca.gov) will vote again on ACA3, The End Slavery in California Act (formerly known as the California Abolition Act). If approved by 27 State Senators, ACA3 will become a ballot proposition that California voters will decide in November. To be clear, involuntary servitude is slavery. According to Black's Law Dictionary, involuntary servitude is defined as "term used when a person is forced to work against his will. Slavery."



Aram Fischer, Angelique Evans (SWFC), Jamilia Land (California Abolition Act) Senator Sydney Kamlager, Samuel Brown (co-founder ASAP) Chris Lodgson (CJEC) Sonia Lewis (ASCRIBE) Allegra Taylor (Village Advocates) Senator Nancy Skinner

On June 23 - just three days after Juneteenth - six California State Senators including

“

I wish CA would fight to end slavery and poverty with as much fervor as we do to protect abortion and end gun violence.”

California Senate Sydney Kamlager

gubernatorial candidate Brian Dahle (R), Steven Glazer (D), Shannon Grove (R), Jim Nielsen (R), Rosilice Ochoa Bogh (R), and Scott Wilk (R) all voted to keep involuntary servitude in California's State Constitution. Fourteen (14) additional Senators withheld their votes, effectively preserving the final vestige of slavery by leaving the amendment seven votes shy of the needed two-thirds majority. Before that vote, ACA3 received unanimous bipartisan support through five State Legislative committees and a 59-0 vote on the floor of the State Assembly.

This change in fortune was likely caused by the California Department of Finance coming out in opposition to the amendment, citing a wildly inflated cost of \$1.5 billion. This assumes that the amendment would force the state to pay inmates the minimum wage. ACA3 does not address

wages; it is about whether or not the Golden State can force incarcerated people to work against their will. In fact, a separate bill by Sen. Bradford addresses the wage issue because it is its own question for the State Legislature to decide. Furthermore, similar amendments passed in Colorado (2018), Utah (2020), and Nebraska (2020) did not lead to this outlandish scenario.

[Senator Steve Glazer released a statement](#) describing his opposition as rooted in the idea that "ACA 3 is not even about involuntary servitude – at least of the kind that was practiced 150 years ago." But when did the meaning of "involuntary servitude" change? Incarcerated Californians continue to be forced to work, including fighting wildfires, manufacturing license plates, and farming alfalfa. If they refuse, they face punishments ranging from loss of phone privileges to solitary confinement to rejection of parole. Furthermore, the member organizations of the End Slavery in California Act Coalition (formerly the California Abolition Act Coalition) believe in and advocate for voluntary rehabilitative work and would not support legislation that eliminates opportunities for incarcerated people to be productive, learn skills, pay restitution, and otherwise improve their persons, prospects, or ability to pay their debt to society.

Involuntary servitude actually looks like slavery. Samuel Nathaniel Brown, the original author of the proposal that is now ACA3, wrote the legislation while directly impacted by involuntary servitude as an inmate at California State Prison Los Angeles County. He served as a Healthcare Facilities Maintenance Worker and was among the [first people to disinfect a COVID-infected space within CDCR](#). As an asthmatic, he asked for adequate PPE and to work every other day to



Democratic State Sen. Sydney Kamlager rubs her eyes as she listens to the debate on ACA3. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli/ Associated Press)



Esteban Nunez (Anti-Recidivism Coalition) Samuel N. Brown (Anti-Violence Safety and Accountability Project) Jamilya Land (California Abolition Act Coalition) Sydney Kamlager (California State Senator)

reduce his exposure to the then-novel coronavirus. He was told that he could work or receive a 1-15 rules violation, which would almost certainly lead to Brown being found unfit for parole and an additional 3-15 years in prison. He chose to work and had a severe case of COVID-19 that nearly killed him.

The ACLU recently released a report entitled "Captive Labor" that includes many stories that echo the challenges faced by Brown. In addition, the report describes involuntary servitude from the roughly \$11 billion dollars worth of labor extracted from incarcerated people to the unsafe conditions they endure. The ACLU recommends legislation that prohibits involuntary servitude, which is seconded by the recently released recommendations by the California Reparations Taskforce.

The next vote on ACA3 is expected on Wednesday, June 29th and will be the State Legislature's final opportunity to decide whether or not to continue enslaving over 120,000 incarcerated Californians.

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