

California Parole-Credit Op-Eds

Four submission-ready op-ed drafts based on the supplied policy brief. No images included.

Los Angeles Times

Target: statewide op-ed, informal, under user's 750-word cap. LAT commonly runs longer, but this version stays concise. Word count: 559.

California should not keep people in prison after it decides they are safe to leave

By [Author Name]

California should honor earned rehabilitation credits for people serving indeterminate terms once the Board of Parole Hearings finds them suitable for release. That is not automatic release. It is not being soft on crime. It is California keeping its word.

Right now, California is arguing with itself over that promise. The state created credit-earning rules under Proposition 57 to reward good conduct, education, self-help, job training and real change. Then litigation over those credits, now before the California Supreme Court, left some people stuck in prison even after the parole board found them suitable. AB 622 would have fixed the problem by clarifying CDCR's authority to apply those credits to life sentences. It failed.

So California is paying to incarcerate people whom its own parole system has already judged safe enough to go home.

I am currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term. I have not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings. I am not writing this because I expect to walk out tomorrow. The board may deny me when my time comes. That is its job. I am writing because the rules should be honest for everyone, including people like me.

If California tells incarcerated people to work, study, stay discipline-free, complete programs, mentor others and prove change, then those efforts must matter. Otherwise rehabilitation becomes a poster on a prison wall. It sounds nice. It changes nothing.

I understand the fear on the other side. Victims and their families deserve to be heard. No one should be released just because they collected certificates. Public safety must come first. But the Board of Parole Hearings is not a rubber stamp. It reviews the crime, conduct in prison, risk, remorse, insight, plans for release and victim input. The governor can review many grants. If someone remains dangerous, the board should say no.

But when the board says yes, California should not turn around and pretend the decision does not count.

This costs all of us. The Legislative Analyst's Office puts the average annual cost of incarcerating one person in CDCR at about \$128,000. Holding a few hundred parole-approved people costs tens of millions of dollars each year. That money could support reentry housing, victim services, mental health care, schools, addiction treatment or public safety programs that actually prevent harm.

It also damages prison culture. Credits work because they give people a reason to build a different life before release. Take away the reward after people have done the work, and you send a dangerous message: why try?

California should do three simple things.

First, the California Supreme Court should restore CDCR's authority to apply earned credits to indeterminate sentences when the parole board has found someone suitable. Second, the Legislature should revive AB 622 or pass a clean successor bill that says the same thing clearly. Third, CDCR and the board should create a transparent process so people, victims and families know exactly how credits affect parole dates.

Accountability should not end at punishment. It should include proof of change. If California wants safer communities, it should reward the behavior that makes people safer to return.

The point is simple. If the state decides someone is still dangerous, keep them in prison. If the state decides they are safe to parole, stop wasting years and millions pretending rehabilitation does not count.

Author note: [Author Name] is currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term and has not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings.

The Fresno Bee

Target: Fresno Bee guest op-ed style, 600 words or fewer, Central Valley emphasis. Word count: 554.

Do not make Central Valley taxpayers pay for prison time California no longer needs

By [Author Name]

California should stop paying to keep people in prison after its own parole board has found them suitable for release. That is wasteful. It is unfair. And for Central Valley readers, it is close to home.

The Valley knows prisons. Families here work in them, drive past them, live near them and pay for them. So this issue is not abstract. When California keeps someone incarcerated after the Board of Parole Hearings has already approved release, taxpayers keep paying. The Legislative Analyst's Office says California spends about \$128,000 a year to incarcerate one person in CDCR. Multiply that by a few hundred people, and the state burns tens of millions of dollars.

That money could be used in Fresno, Madera, Kings, Tulare and Merced counties for mental health treatment, schools, reentry housing, victim services, addiction care and jobs. Instead, it buys unnecessary prison beds.

Here is the problem. Proposition 57 gave CDCR authority to award credits for good conduct, education and rehabilitative programming. Those credits are supposed to encourage people to change. But litigation over whether those credits can advance parole eligibility for people serving indeterminate terms has left some people stuck even after the parole board found them suitable. AB 622 would have clarified the law. It failed.

I am currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term. I have not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings. I am not asking anyone to open the gates for me. When my time comes, the board can deny me if I have not proved I am safe. That is exactly how the system should work.

But if the board says someone has changed enough to return home, California should not erase the credits that helped get them there.

I understand why some people worry. Many victims feel the system already forgets them. They deserve notice, respect and a real voice. Public safety should not be negotiable. But the parole board is not a giveaway. It looks at the crime, the person's behavior, risk, remorse, insight, release plans and victim statements. If someone is still a threat, the answer should be no.

The issue is what happens after the answer is yes.

California tells incarcerated people to stay out of trouble, take classes, join self-help groups, learn job skills and become accountable. Then, for some people, the state says those efforts do not count after all. That is not tough. It is incoherent.

It also makes prisons less safe. Hope matters inside. So do incentives. When people know their work can actually affect their future, they have a reason to keep growing. When the rules shift after the work is done, frustration replaces motivation.

The fix is simple. The California Supreme Court should affirm that CDCR can apply earned credits to indeterminate sentences when the parole board finds someone suitable. The Legislature should revive AB 622

or introduce a successor bill. CDCR should publish clear guidance so everyone knows how credits are calculated.

The Valley should care because this is our money, our workforce, our families and our public safety. Rehabilitation only works if the state is honest about it.

If someone is dangerous, keep them in prison. If the board finds them safe, do not make the rest of us keep paying for a punishment that has already done its job.

Author note: [Author Name] is currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term and has not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings.

San Francisco Chronicle

Target: Chronicle/Open Forum-style commentary, fresh argument, under user's 750-word cap. Word count: 588.

California says it believes in rehabilitation. Its parole-credit rules say otherwise.

By [Author Name]

California should stop telling incarcerated people that rehabilitation matters while refusing to honor the credits they earn for it.

That is the whole issue behind the current fight over Proposition 57 credits for people serving indeterminate terms. The case is now before the California Supreme Court. A legislative fix, AB 622, failed. In the meantime, some people who have already been found suitable for parole remain in prison because their earned credits are being disputed.

That should bother everyone, including people who strongly believe in accountability.

I am currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term. I have not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings. So this is not a personal demand for immediate release. I still have to face the board. I still have to prove insight, remorse, growth and safety. I may be denied.

But a fair system should mean what it says.

Proposition 57 told people inside prison that good conduct, education, self-help and rehabilitation can earn credits. That was smart policy. It encouraged people to do the work everyone says they want incarcerated people to do. Finish programs. Stay discipline-free. Get trained. Mentor others. Become someone who can return safely.

But when the state later refuses to count those credits for some people after the parole board has already found them suitable, it sends a very different message: change if you want, but we may move the finish line anyway.

That is not public safety. That is bad management.

I understand the objection. Some people hear "credits" and think "automatic release." They worry victims will be ignored. They worry people convicted of serious crimes will leave prison too soon. Those concerns deserve respect. No one should minimize the pain behind them.

But a parole grant is not automatic release. The Board of Parole Hearings reviews the original crime, prison record, risk, remorse, insight, release plans and victim input. Commissioners can and do deny parole. The governor can review many grants. If a person remains dangerous, the system has tools to say no.

The question is not whether everyone should be released. They should not.

The question is whether California should keep spending about \$128,000 per person per year after its own process says a person is suitable for parole. For a few hundred people, that becomes tens of millions of dollars. In a state constantly arguing over housing, mental health care, schools and public safety, that is not a small mistake. That is a budget choice.

It is also a moral choice.

Prison should not be only a warehouse for regret. If California wants people to return better than they entered, then the system must reward real change. Otherwise, "rehabilitation" becomes one more word politicians use when it sounds good and abandon when it gets hard.

California should take three steps now.

The Supreme Court should restore CDCR's authority to apply earned credits to indeterminate sentences when the parole board finds someone suitable. Lawmakers should bring back AB 622 or pass a cleaner successor. CDCR should create plain-language credit rules so incarcerated people, victims and families can see how decisions are made.

Keep the board's public-safety review. Keep victim participation. Keep gubernatorial review where the law allows it. But stop pretending that earned rehabilitation is real if the state can erase it at the end.

If California finds someone dangerous, keep that person in prison. If California finds someone suitable for parole, honor the decision. Rehabilitation should count, especially when the state has already said it does.

Author note: [Author Name] is currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term and has not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings.

San Jose Mercury News

Target: Mercury News/Bay Area News Group style, 600 words or fewer, data/accountability emphasis. Word count: 530.

California's parole-credit system fails its own test

By [Author Name]

California should honor earned rehabilitation credits when the Board of Parole Hearings finds someone suitable for release. A system that asks people to prove change, then refuses to count that proof, has failed its own test.

Silicon Valley readers understand incentives. If a system rewards measurable progress, people respond. If a system changes the rules after the work is done, people stop trusting it. California's prison system is doing the second thing.

Proposition 57 gave CDCR authority to award credits for good conduct, education and rehabilitative programs. Those credits are supposed to encourage people to become safer, more accountable and better prepared to return home. But litigation over credits for people serving indeterminate terms, now before the California Supreme Court, has left some people in prison even after the parole board found them suitable. AB 622 would have clarified CDCR's authority. It failed.

I am currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term. I have not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings. This is not a request to skip review. When my hearing comes, I should have to prove that I have insight, remorse, discipline, a release plan and a low risk of harm. If I cannot, the board should deny me.

That is accountability.

But if the board finds someone suitable, California should not keep that person in prison because the state suddenly refuses to honor credits it encouraged them to earn.

This matters for public safety. Credits give people a reason to take programs seriously, avoid violence, learn skills and prepare for life outside. Inside prison, hope is not soft. It is management. It helps keep yards calmer and pushes people toward better choices.

I understand the concern from victims and the public. Some people fear that credit-earning means automatic early release. It does not. The Board of Parole Hearings reviews the crime, conduct in prison, risk, remorse, insight, reentry plans and victim input. Commissioners deny parole when they believe someone remains dangerous. The governor can review many grants. None of that should disappear.

The issue is what happens after the state says yes.

California spends about \$128,000 a year to incarcerate one person in CDCR. Holding a few hundred parole-approved people costs tens of millions of dollars. That money could fund reentry housing, mental health treatment, victim services, addiction care and local crime prevention.

So this is not only a prison issue. It is a government-performance issue. The state has built a process, collected evidence, made a decision and then ignored its own output. No serious organization would call that efficient.

California should fix it now.

The Supreme Court should affirm CDCR's authority to apply earned credits to indeterminate sentences when the board finds someone suitable. The Legislature should revive AB 622 or pass a successor bill. CDCR should publish clear credit rules so incarcerated people, victims and families can understand the process.

Keep public-safety review strong. Keep victim participation real. Keep denials for people who remain dangerous.

But when someone has done the work and the board says release is safe, the state should not pretend rehabilitation did not happen. California should count what it told people to earn.

Author note: [Author Name] is currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term and has not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings.

Fact-check and Submission Notes

Fact-check and submission notes (not part of the op-ed submissions)

Submission conventions used: - Los Angeles Times: op-ed submissions are exclusive, emailed to oped@latimes.com, and commonly run about 750 to 1,000 words. This draft stays under 750 words because of the requested cap. - The Fresno Bee: recent Bee opinion/editorial pages have invited op-eds of about 600 words to letters@fresnobee.com, with regional relevance emphasized by the publication's Valley focus. - San Francisco Chronicle: the Chronicle accepts op-eds through its opinion submission page; this draft uses an Open Forum-style argument with a broad Bay Area/statewide frame and stays under 750 words. - San Jose Mercury News/Bay Area News Group: available submission guidance says op-eds should be 600 words or fewer, exclusive, pasted into email/no attachments, and sent to opinion@bayareanewsgroup.com.

Core factual anchors used: - California's Legislative Analyst's Office reported the average annual CDCR incarceration cost at about \$127,800 per person for the 2025-26 enacted budget. - CDCR describes Proposition 57 as authorizing credit-earning opportunities for good conduct, rehabilitative programming and educational achievements. - CDCR/BPH materials describe the CJLF litigation as affecting people found suitable for parole whose minimum eligible parole dates were advanced by Proposition 57 credits. - The California Supreme Court granted review in *Criminal Justice Legal Foundation v. CDCR*, No. S292887/C100274, in October 2025. - AB 622 was a 2025-2026 bill to require CDCR to apply applicable credits under Article I, section 32 of the California Constitution to people imprisoned under one or more life sentences; Digital Democracy and LegiScan list it as failed/filed with the Chief Clerk on Feb. 2, 2026. - CDCR/BPH has reported very low recidivism for people released after parole hearings, with general recidivism in the low single digits and less than 1 percent involving felony crimes against persons.

Suggested short bio line: [Author Name] is currently incarcerated in CDCR under an indeterminate term and has not yet appeared before the Board of Parole Hearings.