



SB 474 – Basic, Affordable Supplies for Incarcerated Californians (BASIC)

SUMMARY

The BASIC Act alleviates cost pressures for incarcerated people and their families by eliminating price markups on items purchased in California’s prison canteen stores.

BACKGROUND

A prison canteen is a storefront used by incarcerated people to supplement the basic necessities provided by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Incarcerated people can purchase goods such as food, hygiene products, and stationery.

The price of canteen goods is not currently regulated under California law, leading to significant markups on products. In combination with minimal wage earnings, any additional purchases can be extremely costly and represent an unnecessary barrier to basic essentials.

PROBLEM

Incarcerated people in California’s prisons receive limited resources outside of the basics provided by CDCR, resulting in a need for additional goods from the prison canteen. However, current law does not limit pricing on these items which can lead to expensive markups that make goods inaccessible for many incarcerated people.

Depending on the CDCR skill level classification, most incarcerated people make between \$0.08 and \$0.37 an hour, or \$12 to \$56 a month before fees and deductions. In contrast, an 8oz package of coffee grounds can cost up to \$9, representing 16%-75% of their monthly income. A 40 watt light bulb can be purchased at a retail store for less than \$3, but in canteen, light bulbs are marked up 250% and can take up to 72% of the monthly income.

Without support from family, incarcerated people are extremely limited in their ability to keep up with basic needs including personal hygiene. For example, recent price lists at California State Prison Solano indicate markups on toothpaste from the market rate of \$1.38 to the canteen sales price of \$4.45, a markup of over 200% that can take up to 37% of an incarcerated person’s monthly income.

If a family is able to support an incarcerated loved one, the markups create a significant financial burden, as nearly 2 in 3 families with incarcerated family members are unable to meet their own basic needs.¹

SOLUTION

SB 474 eliminates markups on products sold in prison canteens so that the price of the product does not exceed the price paid by CDCR to product vendors. SB 474 is estimated to save incarcerated people and their families \$30 million each year.

SUPPORT

- Women’s Foundation California (co-sponsor)
- Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (co-sponsor)
- Legal Aid at Work (co-sponsor)
- Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (co-sponsor)
- MILPA Collective (co-sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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¹ *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families* Ella Baker Center, 2015