



## **SB 850 – Women’s Prison Reform Act**

*Creates safety measures in California’s Prison system and holds correctional staff accountable.*

### **SUMMARY**

SB 850 addresses the systemic issues of sexual violence and power imbalances within California’s correctional facilities. This bill ensures the rights and dignity of incarcerated women are upheld, sexual abuse is prevented, and perpetrators are held fully accountable.

### **BACKGROUND**

Recent reports of sexual violence at California’s women’s state prisons have highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive prison reform and the reevaluation of privileges granted to correctional staff responsible for the care and safety of incarcerated women.

One prison that has brought this issue to the forefront is the Central California Women’s Facility. As the largest women’s correctional facility in California, and the largest women’s prison in the world, it highlights the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for systemic change.<sup>1</sup>

**Pensions:** Under current law, correctional staff convicted of a job-related felony are required to forfeit their pension benefits, losing access to any future accruals from the date of conviction onward. However, because they are allowed to retain any vested pension amounts earned prior to conviction, this creates a concern. This allows individuals convicted of serious offenses to benefit from significant retirement savings accumulated throughout their public service – including tax dollars paid for by California residents, which can amount upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Because of a correctional staffer’s role as a public servant, and oath to the state of California, this raises serious concerns about whether these vested amounts should be subject to forfeiture. ***SB 850 addresses this by revoking the pension of a correctional staff member convicted of sexually assaulting an incarcerated individual from the date of the crime onward, and removes the entire pension for any new staff member convicted of sexually assaulting an inmate who is employed after 1/1/2026.***

***Solo shifts and Cameras:*** Solo shifts in women’s prisons, particularly when male correctional staff are involved, pose serious risks and have been linked to increased incidents of sexual assault and abuse. When one correctional staff member is left alone with an incarcerated woman – especially in isolated areas like showers and bathrooms – it creates a dangerous power imbalance with little to no oversight. This lack of accountability allows abuse to occur more easily and makes it harder for women to prove their case. Removing solo shifts ensures improved surveillance over a correctional staff’s interactions with incarcerated women. ***SB 850 addresses this by eliminating solo shifts for correctional peace officers in all women’s prisons, and requiring facilities to install fixed cameras by 2028, while reassessing the locations of these cameras annually.***

***Restrictive Units:*** Single-cell units are used by the Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation to isolate incarcerated people who may pose a risk to themselves or others.<sup>2</sup> However, placement in restrictive housing is typically a punitive measure, resulting from rule violations, which forces incarcerated women to choose between breaking the rules or remaining in an unsafe environment if they need respite. It is more humane and effective to allow individuals the option to voluntarily enter restrictive housing, especially for those who feel unsafe or need time away from the general population. ***SB 850 addresses this by allowing incarcerated women to request a single cell unit for a period of respite.***

### **THE PROBLEM**

Sexual assault and abuse in women’s prisons is a serious issue in California. Correctional staff who sexually assault incarcerated women have committed an unacceptable abuse of power. It is an issue that must be addressed swiftly and unwaveringly. Just this year, a corrections staffer who worked at the Central California Women’s Facility was convicted

<sup>1</sup> [Central California Women's Facility \(CCWF\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Restricted Housing - Division of Adult Institutions \(DAI\)](#)

of 64 counts of rape and sexual battery.<sup>3</sup> The correctional staff member was working at the Central California Women's Facility from 2010 to 2022, and clearly abused his power as a correctional staff member to commit horrible acts of sexual abuse against incarcerated women - violating his constitutional duties and the ethical code of conduct that correctional staff are expected to uphold.

Unfortunately, the actions of bad actors misrepresent the work that correctional staff do each day. The correctional staff who commit these heinous and illegal acts are only a small population of the total corrections staff. This needs to be addressed and they need to be held accountable for their actions. There must be less opportunity for correctional staff to abuse their power, more transparency measures to ensure they are caught, and severe penalties for bad actors.

### **THE SOLUTION**

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This bill addresses the sexual abuse of incarcerated women by implementing critical reforms to our California prison system. SB 850 improves the safety in our prisons by:

1. Revoking the pension of any correctional staff convicted of sexually assaulting an incarcerated person,
2. Eliminating solo shifts for correctional staff in all women's prisons,
3. Mandating the completion of fixed cameras ordered by courts or the legislature by 2028, and reassessment of these locations annually,
4. Allowing incarcerated women to request a single cell unit from a Lieutenant on site.

### **SUPPORT**

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- California Correctional Peace Officers Association (sponsor)
- Steinberg Institute

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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<sup>3</sup> [California Prison Guard Guilty of Rape of Incarcerated Women | Fresno Bee](#)