



Center for
Employment
Opportunities



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CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION of
LOCAL CONSERVATION CORPS



ORANGE COUNTY
CONSERVATION CORPS

March 25, 2025

The Honorable Steve Bennett
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4
California State Legislature
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Budget Items 0521 and 2660
Special People Program Bolstered in 2025-26 Budget**

Dear Chair Bennett:

On behalf of a broad coalition of stakeholders, we write to you regarding the Butte County Office of Education (BCOE) Back 2 Work (B2W) program, a workforce initiative funded by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and we request that you support continued investment into B2W.

We applaud the Governor and Caltrans' annual \$80 million commitment for B2W within the Caltrans Special People Program (SPP), similar funding levels during the Clean California Initiative (CCI). However, we are concerned with what is happening at the community level. Although we have been told about this investment, B2W crews are currently being downsized, and at-risk individuals who are in stable jobs are now becoming unemployed and without the ancillary services this program provides.

With what is included in the Governor's budget, we support the \$25 million investment into Clean California Program for a Community Cleanup and Employment Pathways Grant Program, understanding that local government would be encouraged to engage with employment social enterprises (ESEs). ESEs are transformative businesses that are not only creating jobs but are also building an inclusive economy by hiring individuals who face systemic barriers to employment. However, the Governor and the Legislature have already established an incredible program through their work with Caltrans and BCOE. If there were cuts to the B2W, then we believe this funding could be redirected to B2W. Since 2009, B2W has positively contributed to the jobs, livelihoods, and futures of individuals experiencing homelessness or impacted by the justice system, opportunity youth, and veterans – all populations the Governor and the Legislature have worked so diligently to support.

In B2W, Caltrans contracts with BCOE and subcontracts with ESEs across the State to operate a high-impact employment initiative that targets individuals breaking through barriers to employment. B2W provides Californians with work skills and incomes so that they can stabilize their lives and interrupt what can otherwise become costly cycles of joblessness, homelessness, and incarceration. With the CCI investment, B2W grew to 139 crews and employing over 6,000 individuals in 40 California counties, while picking up over 2.55 million bags of litter. Motivated individuals who have experienced homelessness or incarceration are cleaning California's highways while earning an income and paying taxes, gaining valuable work experience and accessing support for their economic mobility – all benefits to the California economy.

BCOE provides all safety training, ensures job quality and labor standards are met, and ultimately contracts with ESEs and nonprofit organizations to employ thousands of individuals as supervised work crews. While the litter abatement program itself offers transitional jobs, this employment directly leads to other permanent opportunities including full-time employment at Caltrans and a wide variety of other industries. Equally as important, it often creates a motivating factor for participants to get additional training and continue positively impacting their careers and futures.

A member of the work crew operated by the Center for Employment Opportunities highlights that: "Having a paycheck every day keeps me moving. It provides daily income for much needed expenses like transportation, food, clothing, and hygiene. It also keeps me out of trouble by not having to resort to anything illegal just to survive. This work opportunity has helped me reach my goals and I am looking forward to a successful future." Manual Castillo CCI Crew 7- Los Angeles

Thank you for supporting and continuing one of California's highest impact employment initiatives. With a continued investment into SPP, you will change the lives of individuals leaving behind homelessness and incarceration – allowing them to increase their incomes, gain valuable work experience, and create more security and stability for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Sincerely,

California Association of Local Conservation Corps (CALCC)
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)
Chrysalis
Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB)
Downtown Streets Team (DST)
Elijah House Foundation
Five Keys Schools and Programs
Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC)
Orange County Conservation Corps (OCCC)
Restore Merced
San Bernardino Community College District (SBCCD)
Urban Corps of San Diego County