



A state constitutional amendment would ban prison labor. (Shutterstock)

SF supervisors support move to end involuntary prison labor in California

[OLIVIA WYNKOOP](#) / Feb. 25, 2021 5:30 p.m. / [NEWS](#) / [NEWSLETTER](#) / [THE CITY](#)

San Francisco Supervisors threw their support Thursday behind Assembly Constitutional Amendment (ACA) 3, a state constitutional amendment that would prohibit involuntary servitude in California prisons.

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Article 1, Section 6 of the state's constitution states: "there shall be no slavery in this state; nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crime." That exception has allowed prisons to pay their prisoners penny wages for manual labor.

Assemblymember Sydney Kamlager (D-Los Angeles) first proposed ACA 3 in December to replace the article's language to "slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited."

The City's Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee voted 3-0 Thursday on Supervisor Matt Haney's proposed resolution to support Kamlager.

The resolution formally states that the Board of Supervisors denounces structural racism and commits to maintaining an "equitable, healthy, and safe environment for all Californians." Supervisors Gordan Mar and Catherine Stefani added themselves as cosponsors.



“This directly impacts the tens of thousands of people currently incarcerated in California prisons and detention centers who are disproportionately Black and Brown,” Haney said. “Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, California inmates have been forced to work for as low as eight cents per hour.”

Dorsey Nunn, civil right activist, executive director of the Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and a former incarcerated individual, said involuntary servitude is not the rehabilitation program that it’s painted to be. Californians are conditioned to see inmates as people worthy of dehumanization because of the exception, he said.

“You can’t volunteer when you are being forced to do this stuff,” Nunn said. “Nobody in their right mind, in the state of California, would take a job if they were paying you 15 cents an hour, or seven cents an hour, or \$2 a day.”

To appear on the 2022 ballot, ACA 3 must be approved with a two-thirds majority by both the Assembly and the state Senate. If it passes, California will follow recent state legislative changes in Colorado, Utah and Nebraska to denounce involuntary servitude.

“If we can’t pass this in California, then there’s something very, very wrong,” said George Galvis, co-founder of civil rights group All of Us or None. “California likes to very much consider itself to be one of the centers of progressive movements in this country and I think it’s really time to move beyond sort of the performative ally-ship on these issues.”

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