

California's County Jails

Brandon Martin and Magnus Lofstrom

OCTOBER 2018

➤ **California has a large number of diverse—and aging—county jail facilities.**

California's counties operate several types of jails, including court holding facilities, temporary holding facilities, and long-term facilities. Nearly all counties operate at least one long-term facility, with more than 110 such facilities in operation across the state. More than half of these facilities were built before 1990.

➤ **The jail population is largely male and being held for felonies.**

Men make up the vast majority of the jail population (87%). More than 64% of inmates are awaiting either arraignment, trial, or sentencing. Inmates held on a felony charge or conviction account for 85% of the jail population.

➤ **Corrections realignment created new pressures for county jails.**

Since realignment began in October 2011, county jails have had oversight over most non-serious, non-violent, non-sexual felons, parolees who violate their parole, and individuals who violate the conditions of their post-release community supervision. Before realignment, the maximum sentence in county jail was one year. Now that lower-level felons serve sentences in county jail, this has changed—there is no limit on the amount of time these offenders can serve. There is some evidence that violence is posing a problem for jail officers and administrators. The number of inmate assaults on staff increased from 703 in the first nine months of 2011 to 1,074 in the same time period of 2014, prior to the implementation of Proposition 47. During the first nine months of 2017 there were 1,291 inmate assaults on staff, down slightly (6%) from the same time period in 2016. Data is unavailable for inmate-on-inmate assaults and officer use of force.

➤ **After an extended period of decline, jail populations increased under realignment ...**

After reaching a high of 84,275 inmates in September 2007, the monthly average daily jail population declined steadily to 71,777 inmates in September 2011—a decrease of 15%. After realignment began, the jail population began to rise; as of October 2014, the month before the passage of Proposition 47, it stood at 82,005 inmates, a gain of 14%—and about 2,000 inmates over the rated capacity of 80,000 (set by the California Board of State and Community Corrections). To address these capacity constraints, counties released 14,321 pre-sentenced and sentenced inmates in October 2014—an increase of 40% (4,102 inmates) from September 2011.

➤ **... but Proposition 47 relieved crowding problems.**

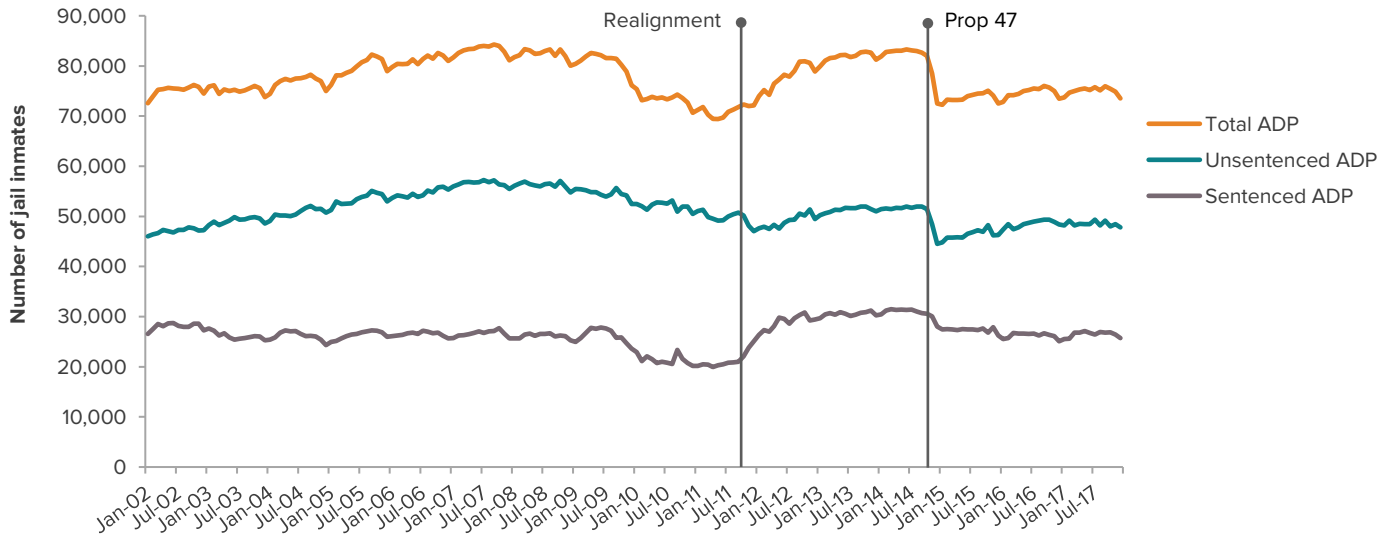
Voters approved Proposition 47 in November 2014, reclassifying several property and drug crimes from felonies to misdemeanors. Prop 47 has had an immediate and lasting impact: the average daily population dropped by almost 10,000 between October 2014 and January 2015. The jail population has remained relatively flat since January 2015, and as of December 2017 it stood at 73,548 inmates, a decrease of 10% (8,457 inmates) from October 2014. At the end of 2017, 30 jails housed populations that exceeded their rated capacities, compared to 53 jails in October 2014. Similarly, capacity-constrained early releases dropped to 5,846 inmates in December 2017—a dramatic 59% decrease from October 2014.

➤ **The state continues to provide assistance to build new jail facilities.**

California has made \$2.5 billion available for county jail construction. Funding programs in AB 900 (2007), SB 1022 (2012), SB 863 (2014), and SB 844 (2016) are paying for additional or replacement jail facilities in almost every California county, with 13 facilities currently completed and occupied. In addition to new or replacement jail beds, counties will have much-needed space for medical, educational, and other services that can help prepare inmates for successful reentry into the community. The drop in inmate population levels under Proposition 47 should be considered when planning long-term jail bed needs, especially given the cost and length of time of construction.



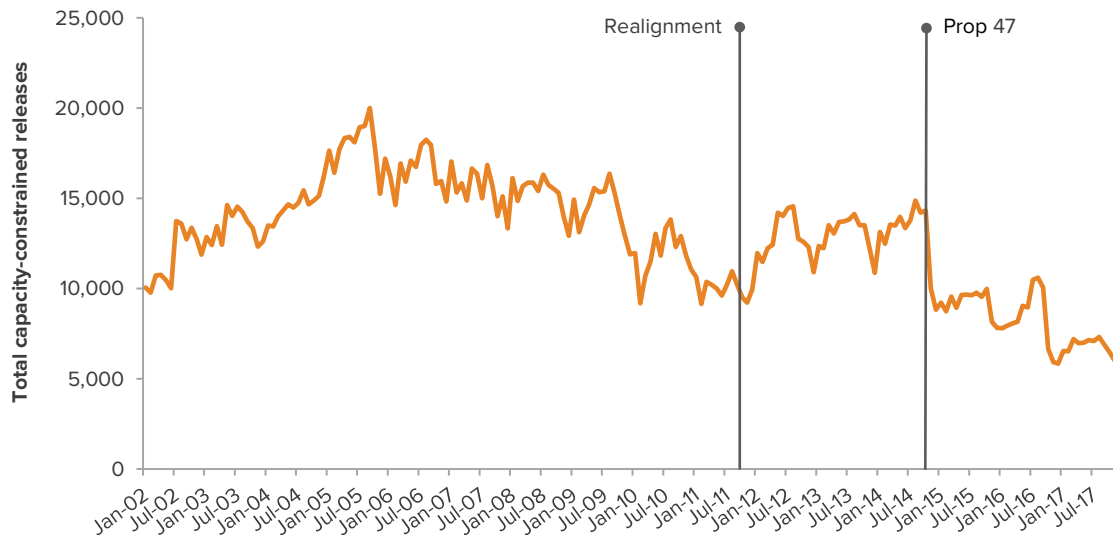
County jail populations grew after realignment but dropped dramatically after Proposition 47



Source: Jail Profile Survey, January 2002–December 2017, Board of State and Community Corrections.

Note: ADP = Average daily population.

Capacity-constrained releases have fallen since the passage of Proposition 47



Source: Jail Profile Survey, January 2002–December 2017, Board of State and Community Corrections.

Note: Release figures include both non-sentenced and sentenced inmates.

Sources: Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), Jail Profile Survey 2002–2017; BSCC Rated Capacity by Facility and Jail Construction Date; BSCC Jail Construction Program Update, July 1, 2018.

Contact: martin@ppic.org

