



June 7, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento CA 95814

**RE: County Voice Needed in Prison Closure Deliberative Process**

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties; the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), a 40-member county association that champions policies on behalf of rural counties; and the Urban Counties of California (UCC), a 14-member coalition representing our state's most populous counties, we write to encourage your Administration to invite and consider the county perspective as well as input much earlier in the state's analysis of and decision making for state prison closures. We believe that county participation in the front-end deliberative process will help identify impacts as well as needed mitigations.

The decline in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) adult institution population witnessed in recent years necessitates consideration of right-sizing the state prison footprint. As part of this process, the Deuel Vocational Institution in San Joaquin County closed in September 2021; closure activities associated with decommissioning the California Correctional Center in Lassen County began in November 2022; and, in December 2022, the full closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison and partial deactivations at six institutions were announced. Each of these decisions had or will have considerable impact on the communities where these facilities are located, including: the direct loss of jobs at the institutions; the likely exodus of former workers and their families; and the resulting impacts on local businesses, the communities' tax base, and local school districts.

When the state embarked on its prison construction boom in the 1980s and 1990s, many facilities were sited in rural or remote regions of the state. In exchange for "hosting prisons," communities embraced the associated economic and growth opportunities along with the promise of stable, middle-class jobs with considerable earning power. Although

our state prison system is not expressly designed to be an economic driver for local communities – instead serving the fundamental rehabilitative and public safety purposes – the fact of the matter is these investments have been transformative, allowing prison host counties and cities to support schools, hospitals, and local business that are now heavily if not entirely reliant on the full and continued operation of the local prison.

It also is important to acknowledge that the considerable decline in the state prison population – certainly hastened by the Three Judge Panel and the state’s need to come into compliance with the court-ordered population cap – was achieved in large part through solutions executed at the county level. Local criminal justice system partners across the state, primarily county sheriffs and probation, have assumed responsibility for tens of thousands of individuals over the last 15 or so years who, absent significant criminal justice reforms, would have remained in the state’s custody or on state supervision. Examples of major policy changes – whether legislatively enacted, voter approved, or court-ordered – that shifted responsibility for particular populations to county responsibility or otherwise reduced the state’s own caseload or custody population include:

- Community Corrections Performance Incentive Grant (SB 678, 2009),
- Public Safety Realignment (AB 109, 2011),
- Three Strikes Reform (Proposition 36, 2012);
- Federal court-ordered prison population reduction (February 2014);
- Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act (Proposition 47, 2014);
- Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act (Proposition 57, 2016); and
- Numerous credit-earning accelerations during the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in 2020).

Simply put, the state would not be in a position to contemplate prison closures today were it not for the counties’ work over the last 15 years to accommodate and implement multiple, extensive, and often contemporaneous criminal justice reforms. We would be remiss if we did not mention our appreciation and acknowledgement of the resources and protections that have accompanied these reforms – especially with respect to 2011 Realignment.

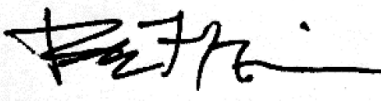
Given that the criminal justice continuum is an interlocking system with roles and responsibilities defined for state and local levels of government, counties, therefore, respectfully request that we be invited into conversations about potential prison closures earlier in the decision-making process so that the impacted jurisdiction(s) can offer input into likely local impacts; help develop plans for communicating with affected communities; and offer locally informed insight into possible mitigations, ideas for best and highest reuse of the facilities, and preferred economic resilience plans. Without a well-thought-out plan

for repurposing, counties also are concerned that if facilities are simply vacated, we will be left to face an array of public safety challenges.

CSAC, RCRC, and UCC greatly appreciate your recognition of community impacts associated with prison facility closures. As partners with the state along the public safety continuum, counties would greatly appreciate the opportunity to engage at the front-end of these vital and life-changing conversations so that we can develop joint and mutually beneficial plans for the optimal reuse and redevelopment opportunities in the affected communities.

Thank you for considering the county perspective on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Ryan Morimune  
Legislative Advocate  
CSAC



Mary-Ann Warmerdam  
Senior Vice President,  
Governmental Affairs  
RCRC



Elizabeth Espinosa  
Legislative Advocate  
UCC

Cc: The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee  
The Honorable Maria Elena Durazo, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review  
Subcommittee No. 5  
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
The Honorable Mia Bonta, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 5  
The Honorable Aisha Wahab, Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee  
The Honorable Reginald Jones-Sawyer, Jr., Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee  
The Honorable Steve Padilla, Member of the Senate  
Jessica Devencenzi, Chief Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin  
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