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**SAVE CHUCK: RIVERSIDE LEGISLATORS PLEA TO GOVERNOR TO KEEP
CHUCKAWALLA VALLEY STATE PRISON OPEN**

BLYTHE CA - State Senators Steve Padilla and Kelly Seyarto and Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia today submitted a joint letter to Governor Gavin Newsom requesting he reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. Newsom included the proposed closure in his proposal 2022-23 budget released in January.

“It is our belief that the goals and considerations motivating the proposed closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison would be better addressed through closure of other California prisons,” write the state legislators. “In particular, we believe the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, CA would be a more fitting candidate.”

The legislators’ proposed alternative aligns with the solution being advanced by ‘[Save Chuck](#),’ a grassroots effort to amplify the voices of the people of Blythe, a city of 14,682 people. ‘Save Chuck’ recognizes that closing Chuckawalla would spell great hardship for the City of Blythe, economic and otherwise, and that the prison plays a crucial role in maintaining community institutions like Blythe’s Palo Verde Hospital, the only community hospital within 50 miles of Blythe.

“We’re fighting to keep Chuckawalla Valley State Prison open because it’s a pillar of our community and economy. The families of many prison employees, as well as the families of inmates, work important jobs in the community,” stated Blythe Mayor Joey DeConinck. “If Chuckawalla were to close, Blythe would not only lose the more than 850 jobs provided by the prison, but would also lose a number of teachers, public servants, and essential workers who serve that population.”

The ‘Save Chuck’ coalition is not just pointing out a problem, but also offering a solution. As an alternative to closing Chuckawalla, the coalition proposes that the State instead close Norco’s California Rehabilitation Center (CRC). Compared to Chuckawalla, CRC plays a relatively less crucial role in sustaining the economy of its respective community. Located in a bustling region of the Inland Empire, CRC’s facilities could easily be repurposed by the public- or private-sector if closed. In fact, CRC facilities used to belong to the Norconian, an Art Deco hotel. The City of Norco has also itself endorsed the closure of CRC for some time and stands with the ‘Save Chuck’ coalition in advocating for its closure in lieu of Chuckawalla.

"The City of Norco’s official position is, if the State is going to close a prison, the right one to close is the California Rehabilitation Center," said Norco Communications Manager Kelli Newton.



The coalition also aims to ensure that the State makes decisions that are aligned with its own interests. In announcing the proposed closure of Chuckawalla, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) cited the following criteria as informing its selection of a prison: operational costs, impact on the surrounding communities and workforce, public safety and rehabilitation, housing needs for all populations, long-term investments in state-owned and operated correctional facilities, and durability of the State's solution to overcrowding.

Chuckawalla is relatively less expensive to operate than CRC, with annual per capita operational expenditures of \$58,101 and \$68,250 respectively (in 2019-2020). At around 2,000 inmates, CRC costs the State about \$20 million more than Chuckawalla to operate.

In terms of public safety and rehabilitation, CRC was built between two fault lines and, as a block prison, it's harder for emergency medical services to respond during a natural disaster. On the other hand, Chuckawalla is not in a wildfire danger zone or on or near a fault line. Chuckawalla also has an offering of 24 inmate rehabilitation programs, while CRC has 20.

In terms of long-term investments, CRC has received no significant capital investments since 2012. Meanwhile, the State invested in a zero net energy (ZNE) health care facility at Chuckawalla three years ago. These modifications result in lower operational costs and have allowed for the allocation of funds to other areas such as Chuckawalla's state-of-the-art energy efficiency equipment including solar panels, a water treatment plant and a new energy-efficient air conditioning unit.

Finally, the durability of the State's solution to overcrowding would be affected by either prison closing. Though CRC and Chuckawalla have inmate capacities of 2,491 and 1,738 respectively, closure of CRC would save the State more money while keeping the less overcrowded Chuckawalla prison at a manageable capacity as inmate populations continue to decline.

There are many reasons CRC would be a better candidate for closure than Chuckawalla for both the State and the City of Blythe. The Save Chuck coalition urges legislators to listen to the voices of the people and recognize that saving Chuck is the best way to save Blythe.

To learn more about 'Save Chuck' and join the growing coalition, visit savechuck.org.

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