

City of Calimesa

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"Preserving and enhancing the open space atmosphere and quality of life in Calimesa"



March 9, 2023

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

Re: Reconsideration of the Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe

Dear Governor Newsom:

The City of Calimesa supports the City of Blythe in their request that you reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP), which is located in the City of Blythe. Closing CVSP will have a disproportionate impact on the City of Blythe, the Palo Verde Valley which is one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in the state, and, as a result, the Riverside County region. We need to be lifting up communities that need assistance, not aiding them in becoming more disadvantaged. If the State is committed to closing a prison facility, the City of Calimesa further supports the City of Norco in its request to have the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) shuttered instead of CVSP.

Blythe is a small, geographically isolated city located in eastern Riverside County on the border between California and Arizona. Due to their isolated location, many families of incarcerated individuals and prison staff have made Blythe their home and with the current housing crisis it may be incredibly challenging for these individuals and families to afford housing in less affordable areas of the State where the prisons remaining open are located.

In our request to you for reconsideration, we encourage you to explain why CVSP was chosen for closure when it is one of the new prisons that has a robust offering of rehabilitative programming. Furthermore, the potentially for job loss in the City is staggering and debilitating. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is required to take into consideration workforce impacts when determining prison closures. CVSP is a major employer in Blythe, employing 852 individuals, most of which reside in Blythe and the Coachella Valley. Palo Verde College, located in Blythe, will lose 250 full time equivalent students due to this closure because the college pioneered an inmate education program that has since become a statewide program. Impacts will also be felt at Palo Verde Hospital, which routinely treats patients from CVSP, Blythe has the only hospital for 100+ miles. Most of their residents are without insurance or are on State-subsidized plans. Sustaining hospital operations without the prison will be challenging. The closure of CVSP could ultimately result in the loss of their community hospital, leaving thousands of residents, most of which do not have a car or the means to travel 100 miles to a hospital, without access to health care. Additionally, if the hospital were to close it would result in the loss of approximately 115 hospital employee jobs.

Furthermore, CVSP is one of the newer facilities in the State Prison System. The State recently invested hundreds of millions of dollars upgrading the HVAC system at CVSP to accommodate inmates in the summer months. Also, according to the February 28, 2020 report prepared by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), entitled "The 2020-21 Budget: Effectively Managing State Prison Infrastructure",¹ a recent study recommended over 150 specific infrastructure improvement projects across the State's 12 oldest prisons, which were built between the 1850s and 1960s. The estimated cost to complete the projects was \$11 billion. Among the 12 oldest prisons are San Quentin State Prison (1852), California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo (1961), and California Rehabilitation Center in Norco (1941-1962) which are located on prime real estate lands that could be redeveloped into projects that provide millions of dollars in economic investment into the State. In contrast to the \$11 billion needed to make improvements at the 12 oldest prisons, the LAO's 2020 report estimated that it would cost approximately \$8 billion to address maintenance and repairs needed at the 22 newer prisons in the system. The estimated cost for maintenance and repairs for CVSP was \$430 million, compared to \$1.647 billion for projects at San Quentin State Prison, \$1.557 billion for projects at California Men's Colony, and \$1.116 billion for projects at Norco's California Rehabilitation Center. Given the projected budget deficit, it seems prudent stretch the general fund dollars to as many areas as possible.

CVSP and Ironwood State Prison, which is located next door, share a Fire Department, water and sewer utilities and other plant operations and CDCR officials have stated that some of these shared services will need to remain operating at CVSP making it challenging for the site to be used for another purpose. These shared services reduce costs for both institutions. There must be more cost-effective solutions for the State than closing a newer institution in a low-cost area that leverages shared resources. There are minimal opportunities to repurpose this facility but there are ample opportunities to repurpose lands that other older more dilapidated prisons sit on. We would like to encourage you to reassess the proposed prison closure plan.

Both the City of Blythe and Norco deserve a seat at the table and an opportunity to discuss the proposed closure and get answers to many questions they have asked. We support both cities and want to make sure our region has the resources they need to thrive.

Sincerely,



William Davis
Mayor
City of Calimesa

cc: Assemblyman Greg Wallis, 47th District
Senator Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh, 23rd District
Congressman Ken Calvert, 41st District
Supervisor Yxstian Gutierrez, 5th District
Erin Sasse, Riverside County Liaison, League of California Cities