



CITY OF PERRIS
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MICHAEL M. VARGAS

March 8, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor 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 Perris supports the City of Blythe in their request that you reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP). Closing CVSP will have a disproportionate impact on the City of Blythe and the Palo Verde Valley, which is one of the most economically challenged areas in the state. We need to be uplifting communities that need assistance, not aiding them in becoming more disadvantaged. If the state is committed to closing a prison facility, the City of Perris 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.

Furthermore, the potential 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 whom 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 of 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 without access to health care. Additionally, if the hospital were to close, it would result in the loss of approximately 115 hospital employee jobs.

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In addition, the state recently invested hundreds of millions of dollars in 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", 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 is the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco (1941-1962). Norco's CRC is located on prime real estate land 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 \$1.116 billion for projects at Norco's California Rehabilitation Center.

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,



Michael M. Vargas
Mayor

cc: City of Blythe
City of Norco
Molly Wiltshire, Office of California Governor Gavin Newsom
Erin Sasse, League of California Cities