

March 23, 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 La Quinta supports the City of Blythe in its request that you reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP), in the City of Blythe. Closing CVSP will have a disproportionate impact on the City of Blythe in the Palo Verde Valley which is one of the poorest areas in the State and the Riverside County region.

We need to be lifting communities up that need assistance, not aiding them in becoming more disadvantaged. If the State is committed to closing a prison facility, the City of La Quinta further supports the City of Norco in its request to have the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) shuttered instead of CVSP.

CRC is nearly a century old. The facility first opened in 1928 as a luxury hotel. In December 1941, President Roosevelt turned the resort into a Naval hospital which permanently closed in June 1957. In 1962, the federal government donated the facility to the State of California to use as a narcotics center. To help ease overcrowding in the 1980s, CRC began housing felons as well as civil narcotic addicts.

A 2015 inspection by the health department found numerous violations, including standing water, cockroach infestations, rodent droppings, wastewater not draining, no hot water in bathroom sinks, and the dishwashers not reaching the temperature required to ensure sanitation. The cost to repair CRC in 2015 was estimated at more than \$1.4 billion.

That report, made public by Reuters, led to a push to close CRC, and there were plans to do so in 2016, but a federal court order to relieve overcrowding in California's prisons at that time prevented that from happening.

We join the Cities of Blythe and Norco in urging you to consider closing CRC in Norco and leave CVSP in Blythe, which was built as a prison in 1987.

Blythe is a small, geographically isolated city 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.

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 in Blythe stands to 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 in Blythe, the only hospital for more than 100 miles, which routinely treats patients from CVSP. Most of Blythe's 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.

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), titled "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.

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 California Men's Colony, and \$1.116 billion for Norco's California Rehabilitation Center. Given the projected budget deficit, it seems prudent to stretch the general fund dollars to as many areas as possible.

There must be more cost-effective solutions for the State than closing a newer institution in a low-cost area. There are minimal opportunities to repurpose this facility but there are ample opportunities to repurpose the lands on which other older more dilapidated prisons sit.

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

Sincerely,



Linda Evans, Mayor
City of La Quinta



John Pena, Councilmember
City of La Quinta



Steve Sanchez, Mayor Pro Tem
City of La Quinta



Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Councilmember
City of La Quinta



Deborah McGarrey, Councilmember
City of La Quinta