

County of Riverside

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SUPERVISOR V. MANUEL PEREZ FOURTH DISTRICT

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Via email: molly.wiltshire@gov.ca.gov

RE: Support of City of Blythe Concerns Regarding Chuckawalla Valley State Prison Planned Closure

Dear Governor Newsom,

I am writing in support of the concerns of the City of Blythe about the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation's December 2022 announcement to begin the process of closing Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe, California by March 2025.

I support reducing incarceration and increasing rehabilitation and re-investing back into community supports and services that prevent crime and fight poverty. I am also deeply concerned about the very real hardship for the City of Blythe and the Palo Verde Valley that the closure of this facility would create.

Already, Blythe is struggling and is a very challenged area and economically depressed. According to the California State Auditor, Blythe is ranked the third most fiscally distressed city of over 470 cities in the state. A more recent report by the Riverside County Grand Jury indicated many challenges to the city's viability and a severe need for investment and economic activity.

The City of Blythe has raised several points and questions that deserve further study. One question is about closing facilities in rural communities, when rural communities lack the availability of enough good paying jobs. Residents of Blythe and, to some extent, the Coachella Valley, don't have the same access to well paying job opportunities with health benefits and guaranteed retirement, as more urban regions of the state.

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The city has asked why the Chuckawalla Valley State Prison was selected for closure when it is one of the state's newer facilities. The city has also asked questioned the cost effectiveness to close this facility when there may be others that are older and cost more to maintain. I ask if the state government has considered an alternative and an economic analysis to reach the conclusion to close the Chuckawalla Valley State Prison.

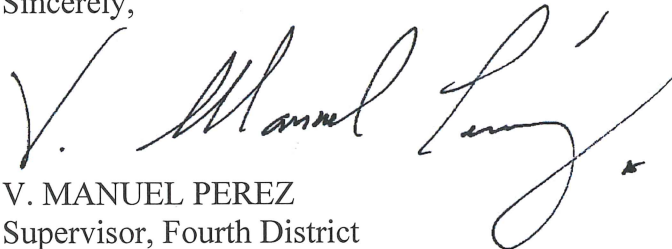
I am very concerned about how the substantial loss of jobs from the community of one of the largest employers would affect the local economy of the Blythe area, from jobs, work contracts, community institutions, and everything in the Blythe community that supports this facility. For 34 years, the Blythe community has been supportive of the state's prisons. With the challenges in Blythe's economy, this closure would create economic instability and exacerbate the issues the community is facing.

In regard to Blythe's future, there is potential around tourism at the Colorado River and recreation, and around wildlife conservation areas that could be a new economic development opportunity to draw birders and admirers of nature. There is potential for a more robust travel center at the Blythe Airport. The state's Interstate 10 beautification project to make a more attractive gateway to California will certainly be helpful in guiding interstate travelers to get off the freeway and stop in Blythe. With that said, vision takes time and, frankly, we are not yet there. The community needs jobs. If they were to go away, it would remove a base of support for local businesses, the city, and the community, making it more difficult to build out these opportunities and a reimagining vision for Blythe.

For these reasons, as the representative of the Blythe community and eastern Riverside County at the county government level, I am in solidarity with the City of Blythe. I recognize that this would bring about impacts on our county as well.

The City of Blythe would like the chance to present its concerns about this decision and its impacts and provide its perspective to you and your administration. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



V. MANUEL PEREZ
Supervisor, Fourth District

VMP:das

cc: City of Blythe, City Council & City Manager
The Honorable Eduardo Garcia