



The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom  
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 Norco strongly supports the City of Blythe in their request that you reconsider the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP), which is located in Blythe. Closing CVSP will have a disproportionate impact on the City of Blythe, 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. The City of Norco supports the 'Save Chuck' coalition with the position, if the State is going to close a prison, California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco is a more fitting candidate for closure in lieu of CVSP for many reasons.

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. 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.

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is required to consider 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 and 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*", 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)
- California Rehabilitation Center in Norco (1941)

**CITY COUNCIL**

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These properties, specifically CRC, are located in areas that present redevelopment opportunities that could significantly benefit the local and regional economy. 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 to stretch the general fund dollars to as many areas as possible.

CSVP and Ironwood State Prison, which is located next door, share a Fire Department, water and sewer utilities, and other plant operations. 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.

The City of Norco encourages you to reassess the proposed prison closure plan. The closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison will devastate Blythe's economy and the City of Blythe will not be able to recover. California Rehabilitation Center in Norco is a more fitting candidate for closure, as it is much older, much more expensive to maintain, and the property and its facilities were never intended to become a prison. The City of Norco supports this solution so that our region has the resources needed to thrive.

Sincerely,



Robin Grundmeyer  
Mayor  
City of Norco

cc:  
Senator Kelly Seyarto, District 32  
Assemblymember Bill Essayli, District 63  
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
Erin Sasse, Cal Cities