



ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

April 10, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed Closure of State Prison Sites

Dear Governor Newsom:

The proposal to close Chuckwalla State Prison, end the lease with CoreCivic for California City Correctional Facility, and deactivate facilities at six state prisons should be reconsidered. As Sheriff of one of our states most populated counties, I am concerned with how these closures will impact our local jail system and, most importantly, the safety of our local community

While it is unclear how many beds will be taken offline due to the closures, the Legislative Analyst Office estimates that the state could have nearly 20,000 empty prison beds, comprising 20% of the state's total prison capacity. The population, which prior to AB 109 was approximately 165,000 in 2010, is 90,934 as of March 2023. Unfortunately, this decline in the prison population and empty bed space is not a reflection of a lack of need in California. Rather it is a shift of this population from the state government onto local communities.

As a result of the Criminal Justice Realignment of 2011, part of the former prison population now serve their time in local jails. The introduction of state prisoners into county correctional facilities changed local jail operations through an influx of inmates who had longer sentences and more serious criminal histories. The influx put new demands on our correctional staff and health personnel. Over the last decade, with a substantial investment of local tax dollars, we have worked to meet the needs of this new group of inmates. In looking at our Orange County Jail population prior to the implementation of COVID-19 emergency protocols, we had approximately 850 AB 109 inmates in our custody. This number declined during the pandemic, but with the end of the COVID-19 emergency and return to normal operations we expect to see a return to March 2020 numbers.

The proposal to further reduce capacity at the state prison has the potential to put added pressure on local correctional facilities. I am particularly concerned that this decision is being made before we fully understand what our prisoner and inmate population will be now that the pandemic has ended and the criminal justice system is finally returning to full operations. During the pandemic, one of the most difficult challenges faced by local correctional facilities was the refusal of CDCR to accept state prisoners awaiting transfer from our jails to state prison. This halt of operations, along with CDCR's early release of state prisoners, created significant danger to the public. We run the risk of repeating this scenario if the state rushes to close facilities before ensuring capacity needs are met for our states criminal offender population.

More significant than the impacts to our county jail facilities is the impact to the safety of our local communities. The de-incarceration efforts of the last decade have made California less safe. In

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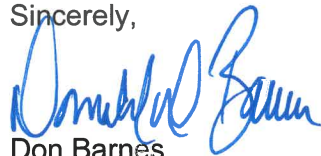
2011 there were 1,794 homicides in California, this number increased by 31.6% to 2,361 in 2021. Aggravated assaults increased by 34.6% from 91,483 to 123,122 in 2021. When we fail to hold people accountable and keep dangerous offenders off our street, our local residents face the consequences. This increase in crime calls for a recalibration of California's criminal justice policies and a restoration of balance to our system. The closure of additional prison facilities would only further distort this balance.

Please do not interpret my desire to preserve prison facilities for support of an incarceration-only approach to criminal justice. I am proud of the work we have done in Orange County to reduce recidivism through innovative programs and treatment for those truly suffering from behavioral health issues like mental illness and addiction. While I believe these efforts will make a meaningful impact, they do not negate the need for sufficient capacity to house criminal offenders.

I urge you to review the impacts of these closures on local communities. Continued reduction of the prison population without a comprehensive effort to mitigate the impacts on our community is an abdication of the State's responsibility and puts law abiding residents at risk.

Thank you for your consideration of my perspective.

Sincerely,



Don Barnes
Sheriff-Coroner