

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



ITEM: 3.2
(ID # 21904)

MEETING DATE:
Tuesday, May 09, 2023

FROM : SUPERVISOR KAREN SPIEGEL AND SUPERVISOR V MANUEL PEREZ :

SUBJECT: SUPERVISOR KAREN SPIEGEL AND SUPERVISOR V. MANUEL PEREZ:
Addressing the Proposed Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison [\$0]

Recommended Motion: That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Authorize the Board Chair to sign a letter on behalf of the Board of Supervisors to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation opposing the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison and suggesting the California Rehabilitation Center as an alternate facility for closure.
2. Authorize the Board Chair to sign a letter in support of Senate Bill 418 (Padilla), which would create the California Prison Redevelopment Commission to identify clear and credible recommendations for creative uses of closed prison facilities that would turn those sites into community assets.
3. Direct the Executive Office to work with all affected County departments to determine the impact of a prison closure on those served by our various programs and how to mitigate the negative effects.
4. Direct the Executive Office to continue to work with the City of Blythe and community stakeholders to identify and quantify the potential economic impact of the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison and to advocate for necessary and appropriate State funding to help support workers, offset the devastating financial burden and implement an economic resilience plan for the region, should the State move forward with the closure.

ACTION:Policy

Karen S. Spiegel *V. Manuel Perez*
Supervisor Karen Spiegel, Supervisor 2nd District 4/3/2023 Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, Supervisor 4th District 5/4/2023

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Background:

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has announced a plan to close Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP) by March 2025. This decision is a part of CDCR's response to budget cuts outlined in the 2022-23 State budget proposed by Governor Gavin Newsom in January of this year.

According to a CDCR press release, the prison was chosen pursuant to criteria set forth by the State legislature in Penal Code section 2067. CDCR's leadership evaluated the options for prison closures, pursuant to the 2022-23 budget and Penal Code requirements, and considered several factors including impact of closure on the surrounding communities and the workforce; cost to operate; housing needs for all populations; long-term investments in state-owned and operated correctional facilities; public safety and rehabilitation; and durability of the state's solution to prison overcrowding.

Careful consideration of the factors set forth in Penal Code section reveals that the closure of another California prison makes more sense. Specifically, the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco would be a more fitting candidate for closure.

- Impact of Closure on the Surrounding Communities and Workforce. The City of Blythe, located in the heart of the desert along California's eastern border, is relatively secluded from other urban areas. It is a rural community with few economic prospects. In 2020, the California State Auditor Dashboard ranked Blythe as 9th on the Distressed Cities Index, which ranks 430 California cities based on their financial health. Blythe's residents are also challenged with the "Disadvantaged Community" label with a median household income of \$49,235 and 22.4% of people living in poverty. The Riverside County Grand Jury has gone as far as declaring that "Blythe is Dying".

CVSP is Blythe's second-largest employer, providing over 800 jobs to a population of 17,793 residents. If it were to close, the jobs and income spent in the community would be lost. The economic impact would be devastating.

It is also not clear how its facilities could be usefully repurposed by the State or private industries for that matter. Given that maintenance services would be required to keep CVSP's infrastructure from deteriorating, CVSP's closure would render these facilities a sunk cost for the State of California.

Further, the families of CVSP inmates have made Blythe their home. With a lower cost of living (median home price of \$219,528 vs. Norco's \$775,089), Blythe makes it financially feasible for inmates and their families to stick together. Closing Blythe and relocating inmates would mean the families of inmates would also have to move to stay near their loved ones, and this could

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spell an intense financial burden for these families. Families of prison employees, many of which include Blythe's teachers, public servants, and essential workers, would also have to relocate.

Additionally, Palo Verde College in Blythe relies heavily on those associated with CVSP. Whether it is the training the future workforce or the continuing education of the staff and incarcerated people, the CVSP plays an outsized role in the healthy community college ecosystem.

Finally, CVSP plays a crucial role in maintaining Blythe's Palo Verde Hospital. This hospital serves both Palo Verde Valley and La Paz County and is the only community hospital within 50 miles of Blythe. It is not clear that the hospital's continued operations would be viable if CVSP were to close.

On the other hand, CRC lies in the heart of California's Inland Empire and is surrounded by several bustling economies. CRC plays a relatively less crucial role in sustaining the economy of its respective community. CRC has a very opportune location that is ideal for the repurposing of facilities, and this is evidenced by the fact that it is the location of the Norconian, a now-vacant Art Deco hotel.

In addition to better serving the State's interests, closing CRC is also better aligned with the interests of Blythe residents who are, unlike nearly every other community, enthusiastic supporters of the prison in their community. This is in direct contrast to Norco residents, who have been advocating for the closure of CRC for years.

- Costs to Operate. CVSP is relatively less expensive to operate than CRC, with annual per capita operational expenditures of \$58,101 and \$68,250 respectively (in 2019-2020). At around 2,000 inmates, CRC costs the State about \$20 million more than CVSP to operate.
- Long-Term Investments in State-Owned and Operated Correctional Facilities. As one of the 12 oldest prisons in California, CRC's aging infrastructure represents a significant financial burden on CDCR. The *Legislative Analyst's Report on State Prison Infrastructure (2020)* suggests that CRC requires \$1.1 billion in infrastructure improvements, while CVSP requires \$430 million in repairs.

CRC has received no significant capital investments since 2012. Meanwhile, the State invested in a zero net energy (ZNE) health care facility at CVSP three years ago. These modifications result in lower operational costs and have allowed for the allocation of funds to other areas such as CVSP's state-of-the-art energy efficiency equipment including solar panels, a water treatment plant and a new energy-efficient air conditioning unit.

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- Public safety and Rehabilitation. CRC was built between two fault lines and, as a block prison, it's harder for emergency medical services to respond during a natural disaster. On the other hand, CVSP is not in a wildfire danger zone or on or near a fault line. CVSP also has an offering of 24 inmate rehabilitation programs, while CRC has 20.
- Durability of the State's Solution to Prison Overcrowding. The durability of the State's solution to overcrowding would be affected by either prison closing. Though CRC and CVSP have inmate capacities of 2,491 and 1,738 respectively, closure of CRC would save the State more money while keeping the less overcrowded CVSP at a manageable capacity as inmate populations continue to decline.

The Californians United for a Responsible Budget's (CURB) report on *People's Plan for Prison Closure* proposes a list of prisons that are top contenders for closure on the basis of the following criteria: overcrowding, cost of incarceration; location of the prison; distance from loved ones; and homicide/suicide rates. Number one on the closure list? CRC. Meanwhile, CVSP is not mentioned.

While closing any of the three prisons located in Riverside County would result in an impact to the region and we would rather not see any prison closed, if the State must shutter a facility it should be CRC. After careful consideration of the factors listed in Penal Code section 2067, and almost every other conceivable factor, closing CVSP would be devastating to an already challenged community. Put simply, replacing Chuckawalla Valley State Prison with the California Rehabilitation Center is the right thing to do.

If CDCR continues to move forward with closure of CVSP, the State must work directly with stakeholders in Riverside County to help support workers and foster a community-led economic resilience plan for the community impacted by the closure. Additionally, the legislature should establish a California Prison Redevelopment Commission tasked with preparing a report with the commission's findings and recommendations that deliver a set of clear and credible recommendations for creative uses of closed prison facilities that will turn those sites into community assets, as specified in SB 418 (Padilla).