PRISON CLOSURE PROPOSAL

PROPOSAL

- Given the California Department of Corrections' (CDC) written commitment to reduce its prisoner population by 15,000 by June 2005;
- Given CDC's statement that closures of prisons are assumed;
- Given the recognition in the Governor's budget that "entire institution closures nearly double the potential savings [of a smaller prison population] by avoiding fixed costs,"
- And given the Governor's creation of a commission to study and recommend prison closures;

We call upon the Governor, the CDC and the Legislature to take the following actions:

1. Do Not Open the Delano II Prison
2. Close Pelican Bay State Prison
3. Close Folsom State Prison
4. Close Valley State Prison for Women
5. Close California Correctional Center, Susanville

BACKGROUND

The California Department of Corrections has issued a memo stating that, due to budget cuts and corresponding legislative reforms enacted last year, it is developing a plan to reduce the number of people locked up in California prisons by 15,000 by June 2005. The memo goes on to say "With the population reductions estimated at approximately 15,000 in the 2004/05 fiscal year, it must be assumed that we may be facing prison / facility closures."

In his budget released January 2004, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger calls for the creation of "a Commission [to] proactively evaluate and recommend future closures for both CDC and the Youth Authority". He has mandated this commission to develop a "detailed reform proposal with associated budget reductions" to submit to the Legislature as part of the Governor's May Revised Budget.
1. Do Not Open the Delano II Prison

Now is the time to correct the expensive mistake that is the Delano II prison. When Delano II was authorized in Spring 1999, the CDC was projecting a total prison population of 184,973 by 2003. The current actual prison population in the state is 161,079. In other words, today's prisoner population is 23,894 fewer prisoners - or almost 5 full prisons — than the Department was projecting when it sought authorization to construct Delano II.

The CDC’s most recent population projections (Fall 2003) forecast a 2009 prisoner population of 163,987, a growth of fewer than 2,000 people since 1999. Most significantly, these figures do NOT include the projected reduction in the prison population of 15,000 by June 2005. The Delano II prison is currently scheduled to open no later than April 2005.

Because the Delano II prison is being funded with Lease Revenue Bonds, voters were not allowed to vote on Delano II. Poll after poll has found that Californians favor cuts to prison spending over any other area of state spending. The Delano II prison will cost over $700 million to construct and approximately $100 million a year to operate.

2. Close Pelican Bay State Prison

Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP) was built in 1989 and has been plagued with human rights abuses since its opening. The conditions in PBSP's Security Housing Unit (SHU) were the subject of a major class action lawsuit, *Madrid v. Gomez*. Though a federal court found conditions at the Pelican Bay SHU facility to be unconstitutional in 1995, ruling that prisoners suffered gratuitous and racist beatings and that medical facilities were inadequate, prisoners report that little has changed since that ruling. The total isolation in which prisoners are held in the SHU continues to be the subject of litigation and human rights work.

PBSP is one of the state's most notoriously brutal prisons. It is an isolated institution in the northwestern-most corner of the state. With an operating budget of $133 million (not including legal costs incurred fighting lawsuits stemming from inhumane conditions), it is one of California's most expensive prisons to operate.


The deteriorating Folsom State Prison or 'Old Folsom' is the second oldest prison in the system, having been built in 1880, purportedly to replace the crumbling San Quentin. A 1999 structural retrofit cost the state $11 million, and as the facility continues to deteriorate with age further maintenance will add up to millions of dollars.

There was community and governmental opposition in Folsom to the idea of bringing death row there, and more generally to the expansion of the prison industry in the area. Old Folsom imprisons a total of 3,724 prisoners, the majority of whom are at levels I and II. It is located just East of Sacramento next door to 'New Folsom.' Its annual operating budget is $83.7 million.
4. Close Valley State Prison for Women

Human rights abuses and medical neglect at VSPW are widespread and well documented. Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) – located in the Central Valley in Chowchilla across the street from the Central California Women’s Facility – is known as the Pelican Bay for women. It was built in 1995 and currently imprisons 3,607 women, the vast majority of whom have received low level (Level I and II) classifications.

Diagnosis and treatment for Hepatitis C, HIV and other life-threatening diseases at VSPW is inconsistent and grossly inadequate; medical staff consistently refuse to provide seriously ill prisoners with adequate pain management; and male guards are routinely abusive and invasive to female prisoners.

The Security Housing Unit at VSPW holds from 44 to 52 women, many of whom are mentally ill. The level of isolation in the SHU renders women extremely vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault, and SHU prisoners are denied reasonable access to attorneys. With substandard mental health treatment and no Psychiatric Services Unit, VSPW’s psychiatrically disabled prisoners are placed in an increasingly chaotic SHU.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur Against Violence Against Women, Amnesty International, California Prison Focus and other groups have documented these abuses for the decade that VSPW has been open.

According to the CDC, it costs $88 million a year to run Valley State.

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5. Close California Correctional Center, Susanville

Susanville is a prime candidate for closure because it houses primarily Camp, Level I and II prisoners and it is located far away from the majority of the families of prisoners housed there. Susanville was built in 1963 in the Northern high desert of California. It imprisons 5,972 men, most of whom are classified at Camp, Level I and II.

In 1998, the FBI launched a civil rights investigation into the Susanville penitentiary around the role guards played in the beatings and killings of several prisoners, following a number of prisoners' assaults and deaths.

According to the CDC, it costs $106 million a year to run California Correctional Center, Susanville, making it one of the most expensive prisons in California.
CONCLUSION

Closure of the above prisons would decrease the state's prison capacity by 16,574 beds, just slightly more than the projected drop in the state's prison population.

We recognize that a drop in the state's prison population will mean more people coming home, and that a critical part of keeping prisons closed is making sure that people are not returned to prison. Real safety and security in our communities will come only from a shift in resources away from prisons, prisons and more prisons and toward the creation of a comprehensive safety net for those coming home.

The following organizations comprise Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) and endorse the above proposal to not open the Delano II prison and to close Pelican Bay State Prison, Valley State Prison for Women, Folsom State Prison, and California Correctional Center, Susanville.

Action Committee for Women in Prison  
All of Us or None  
Books Not Bars  
Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project  
California Attorneys for Criminal Justice  
California Coalition for Women Prisoners  
California Interfaith Alliance for Prison Reform  
California Prison Focus  
California Prison Moratorium Project  
Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice  
Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment  
Coalition on Homelessness, SF  
Community Wellness Partnership  
Critical Resistance Los Angeles  
Critical Resistance Oakland 

Drug Policy Alliance  
Education Not Incarceration Coalition  
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
Free Battered Women  
Friends Committee on Legislation  
Just Cause Oakland  
Justice Now  
Justice Policy Institute  
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children  
National Lawyers Guild - SF Bay Area  
Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to  
Support Political Prisoners  
Prison Activist Resource Center  
Prisoner Rights Union  
Proyecto Common Touch  
Youth Force Coalition

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