THE SACRAMENTO BEE

CAPITOL ALERT

Legislative Analyst's Office recommends closing another CA prison to save money

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The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office recommended closing the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad to help California reduce its corrections spending. Andrew Kuhn *akuhn@mercedsun-star.com*

As California's incarcerated population continues to decline and state leaders confront a muti-billion dollar deficit, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office recommended closing another prison in the coming years.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is already in the process of closing one facility later this year, but legislative analysts suggested closing the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad to help save $150 million annually.

The union representing correctional officers quickly opposed the recommendation in a Monday afternoon statement, arguing that permanent closures present fiscal and operational risks to California.

“Prison infrastructure cannot be turned on and off like a light switch. Capacity decisions must reflect crime trends, sentencing changes and long-term correctional planning, not short-term budget considerations,” said California Correctional Peace Officers Association President Neil Flood.

Last year, CDCR announced that it planned to close the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco. The state expects to completely close the Riverside County facility in October. The LAO reported that the prison closure was a primary reason the correctional department’s 2026-27 budget decreased by $258 million compared to the current fiscal year.

The analysts’ report concluded that the Soledad prison was a “strong candidate for closure” because it would allow the state to forgo paying for infrastructure projects at that facility. The LAO left open the possibility of the administration’s recommending another prison for closure. The Governor’s Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The state is planning to install a video surveillance system at the Soledad prison, which is meant to increase accountability of correctional staff. The project is expected to cost $10 million, the report noted. In total, CDCR estimated that it needed $2.5 billion over the next 10 years to complete dozens of critical maintenance projects across 25 prisons in the state.

The recommendation was made based on projection of California’s declining prison populations. In 2020, over 110,000 people lived in California prisons. CDCR expects the incarcerated population to fall below 85,000 by 2030.

Under Gov. Gavin Newsom, California has closed several other prisons since 2021, including Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in Blythe, Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy and California Correctional Center in Susanville. Those shuttered facilities have helped the state save $1 billion annually, the report stated.

Prison staff at the Norco facility have been in the process of relocating or finding new jobs since the administration moved to close CRC in August.

The peace officers union argued against the closure by noting that the Soledad facility provides stable jobs in the Central Coast region and supports local infrastructure. The union president said the closure recommendation overlooks the potential for an increase in the prison population as sentencing changes and local charging policies continue to evolve.

“Reducing capacity without a comprehensive plan for programming, staffing and long-term demand is shortsighted,” Flood said.