



California State Association of Counties

PARTNERING FOR CORRECTIONS REFORM: COUNTIES SEEK AN INCLUSIVE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

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The Governor's 2007–08 budget proposes bold changes to the state and local corrections systems. In addition to making a significant investment in the expansion of local adult and juvenile facilities, the reform proposal also contemplates shifting responsibility for certain adult and juvenile offenders to county control and supervision. The plan proposes establishment of re-entry facilities to more successfully transition offenders back into the communities; would make a significant invest in adult probation services; and create a sentencing commission. California counties have a great deal at stake in these discussions and will be working to define a clear path for communication and coordination to assure meaningful county input in these discussions.

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- × Systems are linked; solutions should be, too. Counties must be active participants in any effort to improve the corrections system in our state. Local and state corrections systems are inextricably connected, and it is rational to collectively pursue policy decisions about how to best manage offenders who are now in or will be returning to our communities; about how to make smart investments earlier on in the continuum of criminality to divert likely offenders from detention; and about how we can make most productive use of offenders' time when they are detained – either at the local or state level.
 - × What is at stake? There is a great deal at stake for counties in the context of these reform discussions — both financially and operationally. While there are many key county interests who must bring to bear their expertise in defining technical elements of the reform package, it is ultimately county boards of supervisors and county administrators who will have to face the realities of implementing a reform plan. Counties in the broadest sense will have the responsibility of balancing the financial and operational demands that will necessarily accompany the Administration's current corrections proposals against the other significant responsibilities we are entrusted to carry out — from foster care to health care to elections and land use, among others.
 - × Can the state and counties work toward shared objectives? Counties and the state share an identical constituent base. By focusing on results both in the form of improved offender outcomes and community safety, we can build a meaningful and mutually beneficial state-county partnership. Our refrain for today and throughout this entire process is that we must define a clear path of communication and coordination to assure that broad county interests are appropriately represented and our issues addressed.
 - × The devil is in the details. The problems that plague the corrections system statewide did not emerge overnight. Counties understand and accept our role and responsibility in the corrections continuum and are willing to contemplate new ways of approaching the problems we share with the state. How we get to a solution and what that solution looks like, however, is not immediately evident and will certainly be costly. For counties, funding is very significant consideration in the context of a reform plan of this scope. Will the funding materialize for counties' proposed new roles and responsibilities? Will it be sufficient, sustained, and protected? These questions color virtually every aspect of counties' perspective on this comprehensive reform proposal. Beyond funding, do counties have the human infrastructure and practical ability to build the capacity necessary to deliver the services contemplated by this proposal? Are our service systems — probation, mental health, substance abuse treatment, health care and social services — prepared and able to take on new challenges and demands? Can we be assured a joint decision making process for determining siting?

- ✧ Inclusive policymaking. A plan to reform California's corrections systems — a plan that, in fact, seeks to dramatically reshape both the state and local systems — must include the direct involvement of county governments. A reform plan that is designed without direct, front-end input of county supervisors and administrators, who will be entrusted to carry programs forward, will not succeed.
- ✧ What is the critical path? Counties across the state are now examining how the current corrections reform proposal, as we now understand it, will play out in their respective jurisdictions. The immediate response varies from county to county, but there is considerable anxiety over the prospect of new responsibilities, expectations, and relationship. Counties approach this reform proposal with apprehension, but we are nevertheless committed to sitting down and trying to craft solutions to problems that we share with the state — but those solutions must be fiscally and operationally feasible for county governments to carry out. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Legislature, the Administration, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and all other interest groups in the coming weeks and months.

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