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TO: The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor
The Honorable Don Perata, President pro Tempore, California State Senate
The Honorable Dick Ackerman, Republican Leader, California State Senate
The Honorable Fabian Núñez, Speaker, California State Assembly
The Honorable Michael Villines, Republican Leader, California State Assembly

FROM: Steve Keil, CSAC Interim Director
Elizabeth Howard, CSAC Legislative Representative

RE: Sentencing commission

At its recent Board of Directors meeting, the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) voted to endorse in concept the establishment and funding of a Sentencing commission as an independent and advisory body. This memo seeks to advise you of CSAC's statement of conceptual support for establishing a commission.

As you are aware, several states currently have sentencing commissions. Such a body is an important element of public safety oversight, given that the statewide corrections system has many moving parts that operate independently but interrelate in many ways. A Sentencing commission would provide policy makers with an opportunity to, for example, evaluate our existing system, undertake targeted data collection, and identify ways in which we can effect systemic change to improve outcomes.

In the context of our state's clearly established commitment to addressing the twin issues of recidivism reduction and facility overcrowding — as evidenced by the recent passage of the Public Safety and Offender Rehabilitation Services Act of 2007 (AB 900, Solorio) — California needs to think broadly about how state and local governments can do a better job at identifying offender needs, securing improved outcomes for parolees returning to local communities, assuring safe communities, and making proper investments in both the services and programming needed to achieve these objectives. The role of a Sentencing commission in these important assessments would certainly be of value.

The CSAC Board of Directors believes that for a sentencing commission to be effective in carrying out its charge it is imperative that the commission operate as an independent, advisory body. Composition of the commission should include a broad range of professions and disciplines — including appropriate local representation including, but certainly not limited to, a county supervisor or administrative officer — ensure a thorough and comprehensive analysis.

We welcome the opportunity to continue discussions about moving the state's corrections system forward. Thank you for considering our perspective.