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Another Voice: Corrections in Chaos

By Federal Glover on April 9th, 2010

Recipe for a State Corrections System in Chaos:

Serious prison overcrowding.

Involvement of the federal courts.

Prison healthcare system in receivership.

State budget crisis and pressures to reduce prison costs and population.

And the result? Counties, local law enforcement, and communities are bracing for unknown impacts that could result from an influx of prison inmates. Depending on outcomes of state budget discussions and a case pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, counties could see upwards of 40,000 state prison inmates gradually released into their communities over the next several years. A recent [article](#) highlights efforts in my county of Contra Costa as well as neighboring Alameda County to put countywide efforts in place so that the formerly incarcerated experience a more smooth and supportive transition back into their communities.

As it is today, prison inmates receive little, if any, support upon their release from prison. It's the proverbial \$200 and a bus ticket to their county of last legal residence. So none of us should be surprised at California's high recidivism rate, when we are doing very little to help offenders prepare for community reintegration. If we as a state do not begin to invest in a robust and meaningful reentry model, one that provides a bridge for offenders transitioning back into their community, offers targeted treatment and services, and gives the formerly incarcerated an alternative to returning to a life of crime. It is in all of our best interests to have a reentry system – the best interests of the offenders, community, victims, as well as the state and local governmental agencies and policy makers.

As a practical matter, the vast majority of all state prison inmates are released and come back into our communities. Obviously, some communities are more affected by returning prisoners than others, but few are well prepared to provide the type of idea reentry system we should be striving for. Counties understand all too well that if we can't offer a strong network of supportive services – effective and plentiful alcohol and drug treatment, meaningful access to mental health services, to name a few – and if our public safety systems are constrained by declining resources, we have no hope of helping turn the tide on the cycle of reoffending. A concerted effort – that includes sufficient county and community resources to address offenders' needs and builds on innovative partnerships – is imperative if we have any hope as a society of driving down the recidivism rate and getting a handle on the problems of prison and jail overcrowding.

I urge you to work with your community's local public safety, employment, social services, city and nonprofit partners to explore issues around prisoner reentry and to collaborate to identify and address service gaps. This area is one that we can ill afford to ignore.

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About Federal:

Supervisor Federal Glover serves is the District 5 Representative for Contra Costa County and is Chair of CSAC's Administration of Justice Policy Committee.

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One Response to "Another Voice: Corrections in Chaos"

Paul McIntosh says:

04/10/2010 at 10:19 am

Just a note related to the Contra Costa Supervisor's comments about prison releases. I was not accepted in to the response system so could not forward my thoughts. I agree that providing services for recently released inmates could make a significant difference. The Supervisor states that ample mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities/staff could really make a difference and we should try to make those services available. Sadly, and in violation of state law, the Mental Health Services Act funds have been used to replace the state's obligatory mental health programs. The result being dramatically under funded mental health services with increased county client demands. In addition, Prop 36 treatment dollars are cut and there are proposals to cut them further. Private treatment dollars are stretched and the state once again stepped away from it's obligation to the public. Last, I spoke with some very concerned people from state parole. Some inmates are being released with no parole check-in requirements, essentially a clean slate. Based on past data we can expect a fairly high percentage to re-engage the law enforcement and legal system again. Rather than a trip back to a prison I interpret that to mean the counties will arrest, incarcerate, defend, track and care for those individuals. Sadly my sense is that the state is simply shifting responsibilities to the counties while they continue to divert the funds necessary to initiate the essential programs the Supervisor described. Jimmy Smith, Supervisor District One, Humboldt County

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