

# SUPPORT SAFE COMMUNITIES, RESERVE PRISON FOR SERIOUS OFFENSES

February 2010

In 2010, Sacramento will consider several common-sense proposals to safely reduce corrections spending in order to minimize cuts to other important areas, including education and health care. Below are some of these proposals:

- **Keep the response to drug possession local:** Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed keeping people found in possession of a small amount of drugs in county jails, for a year and a day, instead of state prison, for years on end. This change would mark a significant improvement over the current policy of locking people up for years for a petty offense. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), this change would save an estimated \$155 million annually.
- **Reserve prison for serious offenses:** The Governor has also proposed converting certain "wobblers" (offenses that can be charged as either a felony or misdemeanor) into straight misdemeanors, and adjusting for inflation the felony grand theft limit. These conversions have been endorsed by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the LAO, and was a part of the prison reform bill passed out of the Senate (but not approved by the Assembly) in 2009. According to the LAO, reclassifying just five "wobblers" would reduce the daily prison population by about 550 people with petty offenses and cut state costs by \$137 million annually.
- **Ensure fair sentencing and incentivize rehabilitation for incarcerated young people:** Assembly Member Nancy Skinner's bill, AB 999, seeks to stop administrative prolonging of ward stays based on in-custody behavior in the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), a practice that essentially creates indeterminate sentences for young people and accounts for one-third of all custody time in DJJ. This bill would eliminate "time adds" and establish an incentive-credit system by which young people are rewarded for good behavior and participation in rehabilitative programming. In 2009, the bill passed the Assembly floor and the Appropriations and Public Safety committees of the Senate. AB 999 would cut state costs by over \$400 million in corrections based on the current DJJ population and would lead to further facility closure by reducing the number of young people in state custody.

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**Comprehensive reform requires more:** To achieve lasting budget reforms that will improve public safety, the state must address deeper problems within our criminal justice system. A sentencing commission must be established, and its conclusions should be implemented unless 2/3 of the legislature rejects a given provision. Two key areas of reform that should also be addressed are California's Three Strikes law and the death penalty, both of which cost the state billions each year with no demonstrable returns for public safety. The state should limit Three Strikes to violent offenses and replace the death penalty with effective alternatives.

**Replacing the death penalty with permanent imprisonment would save \$250 million annually.**

**Reforming Three Strikes would result in General Fund savings of more than \$1 billion annually.**

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For more information or to get involved, please contact Margaret Dooley-Sammuli at the Drug Policy Alliance ([msammuli@drugpolicy.org](mailto:msammuli@drugpolicy.org)), Natasha Minsker at the ACLU of Northern California ([nminsker@aclunc.org](mailto:nminsker@aclunc.org)) or Kris Lev-Twombly at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights ([kris@ellabakercenter.org](mailto:kris@ellabakercenter.org)).

