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COALITION PROPOSES REDUCTIONS IN PRISON POPULATION THAT WILL SAVE THE STATE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

Brief Filed in Prison Overcrowding Lawsuit Advocates Measures
to Save Millions Without Affecting Public Safety

SAN FRANCISCO- Today Californians United For A Responsible Budget (CURB), a coalition of more than forty community organizations, filed an amicus brief in the prison overcrowding lawsuit being heard by a panel of three federal judges. In its brief CURB, whose constituent organizations represent those individuals and communities most directly impacted by public safety policies, asked the court to alleviate overcrowding by substantially reducing the number of people in State prisons.

“CURB opposes the State’s response to overcrowding, its \$15 billion prison construction program, AB900, because it simply expands a failed system without addressing the root causes of overcrowding, incurring huge costs with no demonstrable improvement in public safety,” says Bob Lane of Critical Resistance, one of the CURB Member Organizations.

The Secretary of Corrections himself, James Tilton, admits the prisons are already “too big to manage.” In addition to the enormous capital costs, the program irresponsibly commits the State to funding future staffing for additional prisons at a cost of more than \$1.6 billion per year. “This massive program will continue the pattern of recent years by siphoning money from education, health care, and vital social services into prisons,” continues Lane. To prevent the futile diversion of resources by AB 900, CURB asks the court to bar its implementation. Only then can the overcrowding crisis be genuinely addressed by pursuing a different approach.

Echoing a string of reports by State commissions and recommendations by State-appointed and funded experts — reports and recommendations which the State has consistently ignored — CURB advocates alleviating overcrowding by reducing the numbers of people in prison. Relying on these recommendations CURB asks the court to order the State to change its parole and sentencing policy, to fully fund Proposition 36’s program of drug treatment instead of imprisonment, to release elderly persons from prison, and to provide housing and job assistance and health care to support those returning home from prison. These measures will bring with them significant cost savings, calculated by the experts to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

“Overcrowding violates the rights of those in prison while unnecessarily depriving their families and communities of their presence, all without making those communities safer,” says Hamdiya Cooks of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners, another member of the CURB coalition. “CURB’s proposals give voice to those who have the most direct interest in changing the

direction of the State's corrections policy. Without implementing the measures CURB proposes the State cannot adequately address prison overcrowding."

"The Governor's recent proposals for early release and changes in parole policy are steps in the right direction, but they do not go far enough to have a significant long term impact on the growing population of those in prison or on the burgeoning corrections budget," says Heidi Strupp of CURB member Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. "Overcrowding can only be alleviated by reducing the number of people in prison, coupled with the changes that CURB proposes, which will not only reduce the population but remove the pressures for future overcrowding."