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## Activist group sues to stop prison bonds

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An anti-prison activist group filed another lawsuit Tuesday to stop the state from financing its prison-expansion plan with "lease revenue" bonds.

The lawsuit by Californians United for a Responsible Budget is the second legal action filed to thwart last year's Assembly Bill 900. The bill contained \$7.4 billion in bonding authority to build space for what is now estimated to be 46,100 new prison beds.

A Sacramento County judge threw out the suit filed last year by Taxpayers for Improving Public Safety. That suit, which also targeted the lease revenue financing mechanism, has since been certified for appellate review, according to the taxpayers' group.

Thomas Nolan, the attorney who filed Tuesday's suit in Sacramento Superior Court, said the new case is different because it challenges the bonds on grounds that they represent a "waste" of money. The earlier suit charged that the state constitution bars the use of lease revenue bonds for prison construction.

AB 900 was passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last year. The bill, which includes a total of \$7.9 billion in funding, promised to build space for the thousands of new beds and tie them to improved rehabilitation programs. It also authorized money for 13,000 new county jail beds and approved what amounted to a \$1.1 billion down payment on 8,000 new medical and mental health beds.

Legislation has since been introduced on behalf of prison medical czar J. Clark Kelso asking for another \$7 billion for the health care beds, including \$6.9 billion in lease revenue bonds.

If lawmakers approve the bonds for the health care beds, which Schwarzenegger supports, the cost to the state's general fund over the next 25 years for the two prison packages combined will be \$1.2 billion a year, according to the Department of Finance.

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