



Californians United for a Responsible Budget

CURB PRISON SPENDING ORG.

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An Open Letter to Our Elected Officials

April 2009

To: Governor Schwarzenegger; Attorney General Brown and our elected representatives in Sacramento

We are members and supporters of Californians United for A Responsible Budget (CURB), a statewide coalition whose mission is to *curb* prison spending by reducing the number of people in prison and the number of prisons in the state.

After decades of litigation and court orders, in February 2009, a federal court tentatively ordered the only real solution to overcrowding: reducing the number of people in prison. We applaud the court's order.

In its defense, the State argued that AB900, a 2007 massive prison expansion plan which would add up to 53,000 prison and jail beds, was the way to alleviate overcrowding. The Court rejected that position: "there is no relief other than a prisoner-release order that will remedy the unconstitutional prison conditions." The court pointed to our unprecedented budget crisis, stating "Even if it were possible for the construction and renovation projects to proceed despite this deficit, they would take many years to complete."

The Court's rejection of building new prisons gives California yet another opportunity to cancel AB900. Instead of AB900, the Court endorsed recommendations already made by the Governor and a Legislative advisory panel that would reduce the prison population, noting the hundreds of millions of dollars these measures would save.

States across the country faced with shrinking budgets are cutting prison spending by reducing the number of people in prison and closing prisons. California already releases 11,000 people every month from prison. Governor Ronald Reagan ordered early releases to address overcrowding. A nationwide study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency found that early release programs did not jeopardize public safety. As the Court noted, Corrections own expert panel has already "recommended a combination of earned credits and parole reform that would reduce the prison population by about 40,000 prisoners." And the Court concluded "that on the basis of the evidence, a prison cap at 120% to 145% of capacity...could be achieved without an adverse effect on public safety."

California's prison budget has increased fivefold since 1994. We have a different vision. Rather than using our limited resources to appeal a final ruling from the federal court, **we urge you to take this unique opportunity to reduce our \$13 billion prison budget by:**

- **Not appealing** the anticipated final ruling of the federal court to reduce the number of people in California's overcrowded prison and move immediately to reduce the number of people in prison;
- Seizing this moment to **cancel what the *New York Times* called the world's largest prison construction project** - \$12 billion of prison and jail construction contained in AB900, and
- Reinvesting the billions saved in legal costs, in not building new prisons and in reducing the number of people in prison in **real public safety for our communities**: quality housing, education, healthcare, and support for people coming home from prison, which have all been under attack in this current budget crisis.

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB)

CURB is:

A New Way of Life
Action Committee for Women in Prison
All of Us or None
All of Us or None- Bay Area Chapter
All of Us or None – Los Angeles Chapter
All of Us or None –San Bernardino Chapter
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California
American Friends Service Committee, Pacific Mountain Region
Bay Area Black Radical Congress
Buddhist Peace Fellowship
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
California Interfaith Alliance for Prison Reform
California Prison Focus
California Prison Moratorium Project
Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment
Central California Environmental Justice Network
Coalition on Homelessness
Community Wellness Partnership
Critical Resistance Oakland
Critical Resistance Los Angeles
Drug Policy Alliance
Education Not Incarceration Coalition
Families to Amend California 's Three Strikes
Free Battered Women
Friends Committee on Legislation
Grayson Neighborhood Council
Just Cause Oakland
Justice Now
Justice Policy Institute
Labor Community Strategy Center
Legal Services for Prisoners With Children
National Lawyers Guild - SF Bay Area
Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to Support Political Prisoners
Penal Reform International
Prison Activist Resource Center
Proyecto Common Touch
Senate Select Community Committee on California's Correctional System
Southern California Library
UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly
University of California Student Association
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (California branch)
Youth Justice Coalition
Youth Law Center

