

Criminal punishment

Business



Strategies to Address Overcrowding in Prisons in California According to Dungan (2009), the state of California has been in the headlines for a very long time not because of producing one of the biggest movie actors of all times as its governor but due alarming rates of congestion in the state's prisons. A look back in the history reveals that between the years 1852 and 1984, the state built only twelve prisons. Eleven years later, sixteen more prisons were added to the list. This period witnessed an escalated number of criminal offenders. The number continued to be on the rise as by 2001, the number of prisons being operated by the department of corrections and was 33.

Out of all three prisons, the ones for women are only four and only one incarcerates both male and female prison offenders (The California Rehabilitation Centre in Norco). The number of inmates that were being housed by these facilities in the year 1977 was 19,600. This figure rose steadily and a decade later, the number skyrocketed by a massive 811 percent to hit 159,000. The number of the inmates keeps on increasing in California and today, the state runs the biggest prison system in the Western world. It is not a surprise, rather factual that a combination of prisoners from Singapore, Netherlands, Germany and France are less than those in California. The prison system in the region is the most overcrowded in the United States of America (Dungan, 2009).

Michael (2009) points out that to date, the state incarcerates one in every eight prisoners in the U. S with surveys indicating that California will ultimately require 30-50 new prisons to cater for the influx of prisoners. This condition has increased stress on the existing facilities in the prisons, an

issue that has led to deteriorating conditions in the prison system in the region. This comes in the wake of prisoners having filed a lawsuit accusing the California prison system of depriving them of a constitutional level of health and medical care. The state lost the trial and promised to make changes in prison to improve the conditions. The system can redeem itself through various strategies that have been used in various parts of the world to reduce the number of prisoners incarcerated.

The first strategy that can help decongest California prison system is to make drastic changes to the parole system. The parole system has been held responsible for the ever increasing number of prisoners in California. The parole violations make prisoners to get back in prison hence increasing overcrowding. Simple parole violations like missing classes have led to this offenders being convicted once again. There is light at the end of the tunnel as California is making sweeping changes to parole system.

The changes will see a removal of very strict parole rules or making them less rigid to help reduce less dangerously high prison populations in the prisons. Studies that have been carried out on the California's parole system and demonstrate that the parole system has to be put under control to deal with crowding. According to Joan Petersilla, a law professor at Stanford University, who has extensively written about California's parole system, there must be drastic changes in the system to ensure that the problem is solved. It is estimated that between 60, 000- 70, 000 California parolees get back to prison yearly for violation. American Legislative Exchange Council (2007) observe that this may be due to simple mistakes such as failing a drug test, gone missing or worse off, committing a new crime for which they

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were not prosecuted. These reforms entail reserving active parole supervision for only the most violent offenders as opposed to also putting least-violent offenders under supervision.

According to state prison officials, the low-risk criminals will be put on banked parole. This means that they can still be subject to warrantless searches by police though they will not be supervised regularly. Another strategy that will help reduce overcrowding is out of state transfers of inmates. This is a very effective way that will temporarily decrease the number of inmates in the prison. This strategy was put to task from June, 2007 by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations (CDCR) through transferring inmates to out-of-state private prison facilities. This process was estimated to transfer up to 400 inmates in a month to out of state prison.

By March of 2009, an approximate total of 8, 000 inmates had been transferred. This reduced prisoners tremendously and this process is scheduled to continue until 1st July, 2011. This process is done by first subjecting those inmates to be transferred to a thorough medical screening. Other reducing overcrowding, the transfer will cut down the risk of spread of infectious diseases and violence, and will solve the problem of staffing as the remaining staff will effectively manage a smaller number of remaining inmates. Additionally the existing facilities will get free space for improved medical services. American Legislative Exchange Council (2007) assert that implementation of rehabilitation programs aimed at reducing recidivism is another effective strategy that can be employed to cut down overcrowding in the prisons.

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All the new beds that will be constructed should be tied with rehabilitation programs. These programs include vocational education, mental health services and substance abuse treatment. This can not be complete without construction of small correctional centers being built in local communities and also securing re-entry facilities for these are rehabilitation centerpiece for legislation (Michael, 2009). The program has to involve activities like anger management classes, job training and placement, housing placement, family counseling among others. All these will go a long way in ensuring that inmate re-entry into the California community is improved, consequently decreasing recidivism and aiding to ease overcrowding in prison while at the same guaranteeing public safety. Building of new prison space will also be another good way of helping to ease overcrowding in the existing facilities.

This will in the end also increase the program of prison rehabilitation and increase the number of beds for inmate medical care. There is a comprehensive plan that will see construction of 40, 000 new prison beds together with much needed medical beds. The strategy that is underway will be made up of 16, 000 infill beds that will get rid of all non-traditional beds. There also will be 16, 000 beds in the secure re-entry facilities for improvement of inmate re-entry into California communities. Additionally, there will be 8, 000 beds mental health and medical beds for guaranteeing appropriate care (American Legislative Exchange Council, 2007).