

NEWS

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Supervisors act to prevent mass release of state prisoners

The Board of Supervisors today unanimously voted to have the county's voice heard in a federal case that threatens to force the release of thousands of felons onto the streets of San Bernardino County.

The Board formally supported plans by San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael A. Ramos to intervene in the federal lawsuit. The lawsuit could result in the establishment of a prison population cap and subsequent mass release of inmates from California prisons. The Board's action today ensures that the severe impacts of such an action on the County of San Bernardino as well as the entire state will be in evidence as federal judges consider a ruling.

"Based on the current state prison population, this case could result in the release of more than 2,500 convicted felons into San Bernardino County neighborhoods," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane. "These felons have not served their time and pose a serious threat to our county."

Vice Chairman Gary Ovitt said studies show more than 70 percent of parolees commit new crimes within a year of their release.

"That means we would likely see more than 1,800 additional crimes in our county within 12 months," Ovitt said. "These felons would probably commit crimes at a higher rate because they would be released early. This risk to our communities is unacceptable."

Supervisor Dennis Hansberger said the mass release threatened by the federal lawsuit will impose real dollar costs on county taxpayers in addition to the toll in human suffering that crime takes on our communities.

"The more than 1,800 crimes this action would bring about in our county will cost taxpayers nearly \$6 million to prosecute and more than \$5 million to defend," Hansberger said, noting that the county has to pay not only the cost of prosecuting criminals, but also the cost of defending them if they can't afford attorneys. "That's a slap in the face the people of this county don't deserve."

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It would also cost the Sheriff's Department an estimated \$2.4 million to incarcerate the additional violators pending trial, and the county's Arrowhead Regional Medical Center more than \$3.6 million to treat them for various illnesses and injuries, based on past experience.

The county is still calculating the numerous potential costs to other county services.

"It is imperative that we do everything we can to reduce the number of state prisoners released to our communities in order to protect our residents," said Supervisor Josie Gonzales. "At the same time, we must quickly prepare for some state prisoners to be dumped in our County."

"Protecting the public from crime has been the top priority of this county for many years, and we have made tremendous strides toward keeping our citizens safe and secure," said Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt. "We don't plan to stand by while a court case threatens to unleash a crime wave in our county. We will follow this case every step of the way, and make sure our voice is heard."