

PRESS ADVISORY

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Forum Sheds Light on County Response to Prison Realignment

RANCHO CUCAMONGA – Sept. 20, 2011 – Nearly 250 community stakeholders including public safety personnel, civic leaders, nonprofit representatives, and mental health professionals attended the Inmate Reintegration Forum hosted by San Bernardino County Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford on Tuesday at the Rancho Cucamonga Community Center.

“I organized the forum to help educate our community about how the County is preparing to address the impacts of the State’s prison realignment plan and to dispel some of the misunderstandings about this sweeping change to our justice system,” Rutherford said.

The forum included presentations by District Attorney Mike Ramos, Sheriff Rod Hoops, Chief Probation Officer Michelle Scray, Behavioral Health Director Allan Rawland, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) Director of Adult Institutions Terri McDonald, and CDCR Chief of External Affairs Erin Sasse.

Under California’s prison realignment legislation (Assembly Bill 109), low-level State prisoners who would normally be placed on parole and supervised by CDCR agents will instead be supervised by county probation officers. In addition, low-level offenders who violate their conditions of release will be sent to county jails rather than state prisons. A low-level offender is defined as someone convicted of a non-sexual, non-violent, or non-serious offense. The realignment legislation goes into effect on October 1. Contrary to popular belief, the legislation will not transfer State prisoners to county jails, and it does not mandate the early release of State prisoners.

“This is a huge change for the State of California and a challenge for San Bernardino County,” Chief Probation Officer Scray said. “However, we are confident that we can do a better job of providing both supervision and treatment services, ultimately reducing the State’s recidivism rate of 67 percent. We should see this challenge as an opportunity for a much-needed change.”

In response to realignment, San Bernardino County will establish three day reporting centers for people on probation to check in with their probation officers on a regular basis. The centers will also provide services such as drug counseling and work training referrals. The County will also partner with community-based organizations to provide services to offenders in remote areas. Officials anticipate about 5,500 to 6,500 additional offenders in the County’s probation system over the next three years because of realignment. About 100 new probation officers are being hired over the next several months to handle the new cases.

Forum speakers expressed concern about how the influx of new offenders into the probation system will impact communities while also expressing optimism about the County’s ability to work collaboratively with local nonprofit and faith-based organizations to help offenders turn their lives around.

“With the implementation of AB109, the number of criminal offenders housed and paroled in San Bernardino County will increase, and that is a real concern for all of us,” Sheriff Hoops said. “It is my responsibility to find alternatives to custody, while keeping public safety our top priority.”

Officials also talked about the importance of educating the public about the impacts of prison realignment.

“Maintaining an open dialogue with the community is going to be essential in the coming months as we attempt to deal with one of the biggest changes in public safety in decades,” District Attorney Ramos said. “I look forward to continuing to work as a team on this issue.”

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