

Prison Spending Initiative would undermine California criminal justice reforms and public safety

In the past decade, California voters and lawmakers have enacted more than a dozen law changes that have prioritized local public safety programs over long prison sentences. These changes have helped the state comply with the federal lawsuit on prison conditions and reduced the crowded prison population while crime rates have remained historically low. These reforms have also reallocated resources toward rehabilitative programs to prepare people in prison to return to the community and expanded trauma recovery services to help victims of crime recover. *These significant gains in our safety agenda are now being put at risk by opponents of reform that want California to return to failed policies of the past.*

The Prison Spending Initiative would repeal key aspects of Public Safety Realignment, Proposition 47, and Proposition 57. Specifically, the Initiative would:

1 Prohibit people in prison from rehabilitating themselves before release.

The Prison Spending Initiative would make certain crimes ineligible for earned time credit and undermine rehabilitation. The vast majority of people in prison in California will be released back into the community, regardless of the classification of their crimes. Instead of warehousing people in prison, California needs to rehabilitate and prepare people for release back into society. California made major progress toward more rehabilitation with Proposition 57. That measure incentivizes people to participate in rehabilitative and educational programming while incarcerated. The Initiative would take that progress away, returning California to a model where people sentenced to prison will be returned to the community without rehabilitation.

2 Incarcerate people for the lowest-level offenses. The Initiative would reduce California's threshold for felony theft to one of the lowest in the nation, wasting taxpayer dollars incarcerating people for nonviolent crimes.

California used to have a prison-first approach to crime, no matter the type of crime. As a result, the prison population exploded and California's schools and social safety net suffered as prison spending rose. Reforms like Proposition 47—a measure that reclassified the lowest-level crimes from felonies to misdemeanors—have helped the state right-size the prison population and create smarter approaches to stop nonviolent crime. The Initiative would reverse that. The measure would mean more jail or prison time for people convicted of nonviolent crimes (petty theft of less than \$250 in property) and it would again make such low-level crimes felonies, thus erecting a lifetime of barriers to stability on those convicted. This will drive incarceration up, when more effective sentencing options could be expanded.

- 3 Return people to prison for noncriminal violations of probation. The Prison Spending Initiative would force California to rely on ineffective forms of supervision that would make Californians less safe.** Since Realignment, probation and parole departments have expanded the use of graduated sanctions to hold people on parole or probation supervision accountable without unnecessary returns to prison for noncriminal violations of supervision rules. The initiative would needlessly change the law so that people are put under increased surveillance and imprisoned, when they could be effectively managed in the local justice system or community. Effective supervision practices can be utilized without changing the law.

Passage of the Prison Spending Initiative would mean less money is available for treatment and helping crime survivors heal.

Proposition 47, 57 and Realignment saved hundreds of millions of dollars that would have been spent housing prisoners, allowing the legislature to invest in local public safety programs. Proposition 47 helped expand the number of trauma recovery centers for crime victims from one to twelve. Each year these centers help thousands of victims access services to recover from crime. If the Initiative passes, more people could be incarcerated annually reducing the money available to for trauma recovery services and local treatment.

The Initiative's backers are seeking to fix a problem that doesn't exist: *Post reform, serious and violent crimes still carry long penalties.*

The backers of the Initiative have made spurious, emotion-laden claims that lawmakers and voters have changed what constitutes a serious crime or violent crime. *This is not the case.* Law enforcement still has the tools to convict, sentence and incarcerate people to long sentences for serious and violent crimes, and has continued to do so in the decade since Proposition 47, 57 and Realignment became law.

California needs more treatment options, and more criminal justice reform.

What is really needed now is for California lawmakers to reallocate money from our \$12 billion corrections budget toward more effective local safety solutions. Rather than repeal criminal justice reforms that are moving in the state in the right direction, lawmakers should build on these reforms and expand local treatment programs to make our communities even safer.

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