



Riverside County District Attorney

# NEWS RELEASE

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## DA PAUL ZELLERBACH CALLS ON STATE TO FUND PRISON CONSTRUCTION

RIVERSIDE -- In the wake of announcements today, April 30, 2014, by the Governor's Office that potentially thousands of felons currently serving time in state prisons will be released early to reduce prison overcrowding, Riverside County District Attorney Paul Zellerbach called upon the legislature to take immediate action to fund additional prison construction.

"This is a completely unacceptable risk to public safety," Zellerbach said. "Our local jails are already overflowing and law enforcement agencies are being pushed to the limit. The state needs to recognize the reality of the situation, think long-term, and take action to provide a solution."

As of April 9, 2014, 116,597 inmates were housed in the state's 34 adult institutions -- which amounts to 141% of design bed capacity -- and 8,762 inmates were housed in out-of-state facilities.

In response to lawsuits decrying crowded prison conditions, in 2009 a federal court ordered California to reduce its inmate population to 137.5% of design capacity within two years. The state was unable to meet the required reduction, despite the enactment of "Public Safety Realignment" legislation in 2011 that shifted responsibility for housing many inmates from the state to the counties and requires local probation departments, rather than state parole, to supervise them upon release. In January, Governor Jerry Brown proposed a plan that included early releases for "non-violent" prisoners such as car thieves, commercial burglars, and drug sellers as well as additional parole options for other state prisoners who are frail, elderly, or serving extended sentences for certain types of non-violent crimes. The Brown administration's analysis indicated that potentially more than 17,000 prisoners could take months or even years off of their sentences.

District Attorney Zellerbach has been a leading advocate for modifications to Realignment that would require all felons sentenced to more than three years in custody to be sent to state prison rather than kept in county jails, pushing since 2012 for legislation that would mandate this change. Thus far, these efforts have met with stiff resistance from the legislature.

"The Sheriff has had to release more than 16,500 inmates early from jail and back into the community since 2012, and more than 3,000 in the last three months alone," Zellerbach said. According to the Riverside County Probation Department, more than 70% of the jail inmates they assess for pretrial release are categorized as above-average to high-risk. "How can the state expect us to handle all of these offenders locally, then release even more from prison, without acknowledging that our legislature also needs to step up and take action to protect the public?" Zellerbach asked. "Offenders are not motivated to change their ways, because they are learning that they may serve only a fraction of their sentences. These early prison releases are yet another example. Without the potential consequence of going to prison for reoffending, many of these people won't be successful in rehabilitation and our community will suffer as a result. This situation undermines the integrity of the entire criminal justice system in this county."