

## **Former San Quentin Warden [Jeanne Woodford] Supports Prop. 5: Responsible Plan to Reduce Prison Overcrowding.**

By Jeanne Woodford

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Our state prison system is badly overcrowded and now costs \$10 billion per year to operate. Those annual costs have doubled since the year 2000, and the budget is expected to grow to \$15 billion per year soon.

I spent over two decades in San Quentin, including several years as warden, before serving as Director of the Department of Corrections. I know how bad things are, and how much worse they could get. That's why I know we need Proposition 5.

Prop. 5 may well be California's last chance to bring about a solution to the many, intertwined problems in our criminal justice system that cause overcrowding. It's a comprehensive measure whose theme is rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.

Remarkably, Prop. 5 saves money, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst: \$1 billion per year in prison operations costs, plus \$2.5 billion in foregone prison construction costs. This seems to be the only measure on the ballot that cuts state costs.

Prop. 5 starts with youth. It launches the state's first system offering drug treatment for at-risk youth. Stop addiction early, and we reduce crime.

The measure also improves and expands drug treatment offered to nonviolent offenders through the courts. Successful treatment has been proved to save the state money and to cut imprisonment.

Finally, Prop. 5 requires treatment inside prisons and for those who have been released. We now send inmates out the door with \$200 or less and a wish and a prayer. Seventy percent come back within a couple of years. A nonstop, revolving door results from bad parole policies and a near-total lack of rehabilitation for inmates and parolees.

Prop. 5 also seeks to change the operational culture of the prison and parole systems, which we must do if we are ever going to reverse the ineffective corrections policies of the last two decades.

If Prop. 5 does not succeed, we could see a train wreck. The likeliest scenarios involve a federal court takeover of our prison system, probably this year, continuing expensive litigation while prison overcrowding and the cost of incarceration continue to grow.

The courts are being forced to intervene because of a continued lack of solutions to California's criminal justice policies. More and more of our youth are ending up in the criminal justice system for drug use where they receive no treatment.

It is time that Californians bring solutions to this problem. Incarceration of non-serious non violent drug offenders does not improve public safety. Treatment and accountability does. Prop 5 provides treatment and accountability. It is accountability for the drug user, the prison system, treatment providers, probation departments and the courts. We need to solve the problem of prison overcrowding not force it upon the courts to solve.

The Legislature and Governor have tried and failed to achieve reform. In 2006, the Governor declared a "state of emergency" for the prisons and called a special session of the Legislature. Not much resulted. A later effort to link sentencing reforms and new prison construction resulted only in money for prison construction. Bad legislative drafting rendered much of that money inaccessible. So we have neither reform nor new prison space.

The plain fact is California cannot afford to build and operate any more prisons. It is time to make responsible choices as other states have done. New York, for example, has reduced their crime rate and their prison population by providing treatment and services to the incarcerated.

Prop. 5 will reduce the prison population by at least 18,000, according to the LAO, and the impact could easily be twice that within a few years. Prop. 5 will make these reductions slowly and safely, without early releases, and with some real hope for long-term benefits like reduced crime, reduced recidivism and reduced prison costs.

Sacramento has failed to solve the prison crisis. Prop. 5 can do it, but if it goes down to defeat next week, count on the problems getting much, much worse. We'll have no youth treatment and continued cuts to court-supervised treatment programs, and a federal takeover of the prison system.

Isn't it time that we California's take the lead in solving our prison crisis? We know drug treatment works. It works for drug users, for their families, for our communities and for public safety. Please vote yes on the only criminal justice solution on the November ballot.

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