



Little Hoover Commission releases report on corrections crisis:

Calls for immediate action by Governor, Legislature to muster political will for prison reform or give the task to an independent commission

After months of receiving testimony, soliciting input from its advisory panel and holding public hearing on California's prison crisis, the Little Hoover Commission has completed its latest report on the issues plaguing California's correction system. Describing the state of this system as nothing less than a "tailspin that threatens public safety and raises the risk of fiscal disaster," the Commission makes three broad recommendations to mitigate the current crisis. Its first recommendation, and the clarion call for government accountability on this issue: the Governor and Legislature should implement a comprehensive strategy to reduce the prison population and improve public safety, or, if they are unwilling to do so, they must turn the duty over to an independent entity authorized to do the job.

The most recent report, titled "Solving California's Corrections Crisis: Time is Running Out," marks the fifth report focusing on public safety and corrections released by the Commission since 2001. Unlike past reports, the current release emphasizes repeatedly the urgent nature of government action to alleviate the current correctional crisis. The demand for government action is timely as the possibility of a federal court stepping in to take control of the corrections system becomes more realistic.

In addition to the recommendation for immediate government action or cessation of control to an authorized body, the Commission further recommends the implementation of evidence-based policies to reduce the population and hold offenders accountable. Specifically, this recommendation calls for the reform of California's parole to focus on offenders determined by validated risk assessment to present the greatest risk of recidivism. Additionally, the recommendation highlights the need for the expansion of treatment programs, increased resources to counties for community-based alternatives, and expansion of judicial authority to set goals for offenders based on risk assessments completed prior to sentencing.

Finally, the Commission recommends the formation of a sentencing commission to set effective, rational and fiscally responsible public safety policy. The Little Hoover Commission suggests such a body should have the authority to develop and revise

sentencing law unless a majority of the Legislature rejects the change. Although Schwarzenegger called for a sentencing commission in his December 2006 plan to address the prison crisis, he envisions a sentencing commission that acts in an advisory capacity, thus limiting the power of its scope.

The Little Hoover Commission is an independent state oversight agency with the mission of investigating state government operations and promoting efficiency, economy and improved services through its reports, recommendations and legislative proposals. It was created in 1962.

For the third time in his career, CJCJ Executive Director Daniel Macallair participated on the Little Hoover Commission Advisory Committee, suggesting the formation of a sentencing committee that would be insulated from the political pressures currently limiting reform.

Of great interest to criminal justice practitioners and researchers, the Commission's report includes an exhaustive compilation of statutory amendments or enactments resulting in increased sentences since the passage of the Determinate Sentencing Act in 1978. In total, 80 substantive increases in sentencing were discovered. The complete list can be found at Appendix F.

"Solving California's Corrections Crisis: Time is Running Out" can be downloaded from the Little Hoover Commission Web site at www.lhc.ca.gov.

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that offers policy analysis, program development and technical assistance in the criminal justice field. For more information, please visit www.cjcj.org or contact Megan Corcoran at 415-621-5661, ext. 309.