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## Brown's vetoes of crime bills rekindle talk of broad sentencing reform



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Gov. Jerry Brown's decision to veto legislation meant to fix holes created by voters and the governor took law enforcement groups by surprise.

That Brown lumped those bills with an assortment of new offenses in a veto message that dwelled on a determination not to add to the 5,000-plus crimes already on California's criminal code told them he is again laying the ground for a broader overhaul of those state laws.

"In the context of prior conversations, he wants to take a broader look at sentencing reform," said Sean Hoffman, lead lobbyist for the California District Attorneys Assn.

Brown's veto message Saturday killed nine bills, including one making it a crime to interfere with firefighting operations by flying unmanned drones over the incident. "Before we keep going down this road," he wrote, "I think we should pause and reflect on how our system of criminal justice could be made more human, more just, and more cost-effective."

But tucked among the proposed new crimes was a bill to restore the prison penalty for sex offenders on parole who remove their GPS devices. It became a county jail

offense in 2011, when Brown made parole violations a local concern as part of reducing prison crowding. The bill was a reaction to the serial killings of four women in Orange County. Two sex offenders with a history of cutting-and-running are charged with their murders.

Brown also vetoed a bill that would restore the felony penalty for possessing club drugs, but only in cases where prosecutors could also prove the drugs were intended to be used to enable sexual assault. Possession of date rape drugs became a misdemeanor in 2014 when California voters passed Proposition 47 revoking the felony penalty for most drug possession.

"We thought if we could get [those bills] through the Legislature, that was the heavy lift," Hoffman said. A veto by Brown lumping fixes to recent legal changes with new crimes was unexpected, he said.

"Maybe this spurs a conversation," Hoffman said, but supporters are wary of making crime and punishment a political issue in an election year such as 2016.

And to take up the issue in 2017, he said, Brown will need to begin behind-the-scenes negotiations now.