

Plan for ex-cons called `absurd'

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With Los Angeles County set to start supervising thousands of nonviolent parolees by Oct. 1, local officials expressed anger Tuesday at flaws in the state program that could leave them short of funds and powerless to control the offenders.

Among the potential problems in the legislation that created Gov. Jerry Brown's realignment plan: County officers currently don't have the legal authority to chase after parolees who skip out on their duties.

Additionally, the state funding for the program is not guaranteed for next year, meaning the cash-strapped county could be stuck with a multimillion-dollar bill in 2012.

"It's stupid and absurd that they could pass this law," said Supervisor Mike Antonovich.

"The ship is sinking and they're giving us glasses to bail out the water," he said. "It's not working, and it's really frightening."

Under Brown's plan, criminals released from state prisons after Oct. 1 will be supervised by the county Probation Department instead of the state, if their last conviction was for a nonviolent, nonserious, nonsexual offense.

County Chief Probation Officer Donald Blevins told the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday about 9,000 offenders will be placed on "post-release community supervision" in the first year of the realignment plan.

The state intends to give the county \$112 million to supervise those offenders, but Blevins said he does not think the amount is enough.

He said more money is needed to help offenders acquire treatment aimed at rehabilitation.

"I would say, from Probation's standpoint, the staffing that we will put in place in the first year will be adequate to handle this population," Blevins said.

"I think my bigger concern is the pool of money for the treatment providers, particularly mental health and substance abuse," he added. "My gut feeling is that I don't think it's enough to do the job adequately."

Both county agencies and community organizations will be tapped to provide those treatments, he said.

He also estimated about 11 percent of the parolees would abscond, or fail to report to their probation officers, within the first year.

But he said the legislation failed to authorize Probation to arrest absconders.

"There was no authority to actually make an arrest or incarcerate when somebody had absconded," he said.

"That is actually part of the legislative fix that is going on right now," he added, noting the sheriff and district attorney have both met with representatives from the Governor's Office about the matter.

Supervisor Gloria Molina expressed alarm, saying until the law is corrected, absconders would be virtually untouchable unless they commit another crime.

"We're only weeks away from when these prisoners arrive, and yet we haven't addressed some of the pending legislative issues," she said.

"I don't know if it's enough to have the sheriff talking to the governor," she added. "It either gets introduced into legislation and it starts moving; otherwise, you potentially could have absconders in the second week of October with no legislative remedy in place."

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokesman Luis Patino said the problem will be corrected in follow-up legislation.

"CDCR understands the importance of getting realignment right," he said. "We are currently working on amendments to fine-tune Assembly Bill 109 and the companion legislation that will make it possible."

Another problem with the legislation was that the state provided funding for only the first year, and it offered no guarantees that the county would be paid beyond that.

County officials said they are looking into hiring only temporary workers until a steady stream of money for salaries is established.

Probation is poised to begin reviewing the files of the offenders it is expected to supervise.

Blevins said that in other counties, CDCR has misidentified offenders eligible for the program. He promised to make sure such mistakes do not happen in Los Angeles.

The Community Corrections Partnership, a body composed of the county's top law enforcement officials, is scheduled today to approve the implementation plan presented by Blevins.

It is deemed accepted by the Board of Supervisors unless rejected by a four-fifths vote.