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57th Assembly District



AB 912 – SAFE (Strategic Anti-Violence Funding Efforts) Act

SUMMARY

The SAFE Act reinvests cost savings from prison closures into programs that reduce violence, provide diversion opportunities, and deliver critical community supports including mental health, education, and vocational services.

BACKGROUND

On December 6, 2022, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) announced the closure and deactivation of two additional prisons. With the closure of these facilities, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) estimates an annual cost savings of \$235.3 million. Reductions in the prison population are the direct result of the Legislature's advancement of sensible legislation and budget items to improve public safety, and advance justice and equity. Rather than returning to the General Fund, it is imperative these savings are kept within the Legislature's crime prevention budget and reinvested into effective strategies proven to further reduce crime and violence.

Studies have shown health-based approaches have been successful in curbing violence through applied, skill-based prevention programs. Addressing youth mental health and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is crucial in mitigating long-term effects, such as substance abuse, mental illness, chronic health problems, and criminality. Existing programs have been successful in providing crucial resources and early intervention to youth.

For instance, skills-based group intervention has been proven successful in relieving PTSD symptoms, depression, and general anxiety among children exposed to trauma. Because evidenced-based programs for trauma-impacted youth have shown consistent success in deterring violence through early intervention, it is crucial that these programs are expanded with priority to the state's regions with the highest homicide and violent crime rates. Further, data

has shown the public health benefits of school-based health centers. Located on school sites, these centers increase preventive health services, reduce mental illness among youth, provide better outcomes for chronic conditions, and improve overall school performance.

First established in 2018, the Youth Reinvestment Grant (YRG) provides funds to local agencies and Native American tribes to implement culturally relevant, trauma-informed diversion programs for minors. Since then, nearly \$60 million has been committed to agencies and tribes throughout the state, proving to yield effective results. For instance, CARAS: Project Evolve's YRG-funded initiative saw a 67% reduction in youth arrests from 2019 to 2021, far exceeding the program's initial 30% reduction goal. With the previous appropriation to YRG ending on June 2023, the state must extend funding to reaffirm its prioritization of this successful grant program.

Further, evidence-based, focused deterrence programs that engage high-risk individuals susceptible to committing violence or reoffending have proven to reduce violence. For example, Oakland's Ceasefire strategy partners local government with community organizations to provide tailored services to support high-risk individuals in stepping away from violence. Within a five-year span, Oakland experienced a 43% reduction in homicides and a 50% reduction in non-fatal shootings.

Creating safe spaces during peak times of violence has also played a crucial role in prevention and diversion. For example, the Summer Night Lights, a component of the Gang Reduction & Youth Development (GRYD) Comprehensive Strategy in Los Angeles, provides extended programming, sports leagues, and spaces for recreation, employment opportunities, and access to local resources. As shown with the success of GRYD's Summer Night Lights, recreation and health-based opportunities are an essential part of reinvesting in communities impacted by violence.

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THIS BILL

AB 912, the SAFE Act, reallocates the \$235 million in annual savings from the proposed closure of two prisons in the 2023-24 state budget. The funds will go to:

1. Expand evidence-based intervention programs for youth who are impacted by trauma;
2. Extend funding for the YRG;
3. Reduce gang violence and gang involvement through programs modeled after successful ones, such as Oakland Ceasefire;
4. Increase access to physical and mental health services for K-12 students through school-based health centers; and,
5. Support parks and recreation opportunities, including summer youth leagues and extended programming.

SUPPORT

National Center for Youth Law (Sponsor)
California School-Based Health Alliance (Sponsor)
California Alliance for Youth & Community Justice
California Public Defenders Association
Californians for Safety and Justice
CARAS – Community Agency for Resources,
Advocacy and Services
Children Now
Community Works
Defy Ventures
Drug Policy Alliance
Faith in the Valley
Freedom 4 Youth
Freedom Within Prison Project
Friends Committee on Legislation
Indivisible CA: StateStrong
Insight Prison Project
James Morehouse Project
John Burton Advocates for Youth
KALW Public Media
La Defensa
Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, Dr.
Debra Duardo
Los Angeles Unified School District
March For Our Lives
MILPA
National Association of Social Workers, CA Chapter

Pacific Juvenile Defender Center
Prosecutors Alliance of California
ReEvolution
Sacred Purpose LLC
San Francisco Youth Commission
Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos
Sigma Beta Xi, Inc.
Smart Justice California
Sow A Seed Community Foundation
Success Stories Program
The Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health
TheatreWorkers Project
Transformative In-Prison Workgroup
Women's Foundation California
Young Women's Freedom Center
Youth Forward

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