



San Quentin State Prison and the California Model: CURB's Position and Recommendations for 2024

WHO WE ARE

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) is a Black-led statewide coalition of more than 80 organizations. Our three point mission is to reduce the number of incarcerated people in California; reduce the number of prisons and jails in our state; shift wasteful spending away from incarceration and toward healthy community investments. Founded in 2003, our coalition amplifies the work of community leaders on issues like sentencing reform, justice reinvestment and prison closure. We've co-sponsored and helped pass legislation that removed thousands of years from people's sentences, returning them home sooner to their loved ones. CURB has stopped over 140,000 jail and prison beds from being built and filled, and moved the state towards closing state prisons for the first time in history as part of our Prison Closure Roadmap informed by thousands of incarcerated people.

THE ISSUE

The San Quentin rebranding project and the new California Model of incarceration remain controversial to many people inside and outside of prisons. While we respect differing perspectives, we firmly disagree with approaches that could potentially funnel more power and funding into the carceral system, only to build structures we might need to tear down later. CURB's role is to provide checks and balances on corrections spending, especially when CDCR is already signaling that they view more prison closures and increased programming in California prisons as incompatible. **We reject this position.** We encourage principled individuals to join us in supporting culture change at CDCR, reducing the prison population, and closing more state prisons to safeguard future generations from the institutions of incarceration. This paper outlines a brief overview of CURB's positions.

WHAT WE SUPPORT

Cultivating a Culture of Respect and Dignity at CDCR, and Improving Living Conditions

At CURB, we passionately believe every incarcerated individual must be treated with the respect and humanity they deserve in living conditions that uphold their dignity. CURB supports many recommendations put forth by the San Quentin Advisory Council (SQAC) and The People In Blue (TPIB) that reflect our coalition's core values such as: Section 1.1 of the SQAC report which calls for the creation of single-cell and single-bunk housing throughout San Quentin, which will require a significant reduction in the population which can be achieved through releases; Section 4.6 which would ensure accessibility needs are proactively met; Section 1.5 which names steps to ensure good nutrition is foundational to incarcerated people at San Quentin, also proposed in section 3.3 of the TPIB report; Section 2.3 which entails changing policies to encourage Correctional Officers and other staff to actively support the rehabilitation efforts of those in their care. This recommendation is also included in section 1.7 of the TPIB report which has to do with new rules and regulations around 'over-familiarity' and ensuring trauma-informed training for all CDCR employees.

Ensuring Access to Support and Programming

CURB enthusiastically supports efforts to ensure incarcerated people have access to programming led by community-based organizations; support systems such as mentors, loved ones, friends, and family; as well as programs that encourage individuals' own autonomy. While community-based support and resources must be fully funded outside of prison walls as well, it is imperative that those incarcerated have access to support while inside. CURB supports many recommendations put forth by the SQAC and TPIB that reflect our coalition's core values such as: Section 6.2 of the SQAC report which includes the modification of policies and services to make family visits easier, more frequent, and more meaningful; Section 3.1 which would involve collaboration with community-based organizations to create rehabilitation and reentry plan for every resident during orientation and update it continually; Section 2.2 of the TPIB report which calls for identifying and addressing gaps in CDCR's rehabilitative care such as overpopulation, underutilized resources including available space for rehabilitative and



reintegration planning; Section 2.3 which includes rehab programs created by incarcerated people; and portions of Section 1.5 regarding processes to facilitate smooth transfer processes by ensuring individuals transferring are aware of rehabilitative programs available at a facility.

Prison Closure and Releases

As part of CURB's mission, we maintain that reducing the number of people incarcerated and closing prisons are two definite ways to end the harm of imprisonment. The state's Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) projects that California can safely close up to five additional state prisons without causing overcrowding. Rather than merely redistributing incarcerated people, CDCR should prioritize reducing prison populations through systematic releases. Despite potential annual savings of \$700 million from prisons already closed, CDCR's budget paradoxically continues to grow, with funds being reinvested within the department itself, including a \$1 billion raise for corrections officers, instead of being directed to community programs. CDCR's argument for needing extra prison space for "rehabilitation" is undermined by their persistent failure to effectively provide these services and their limited efforts to repurpose existing spaces. San Quentin is not currently on our list of prioritized recommendations for prisons for closure. CURB supports SQAC recommendation 1.1 calling for population reduction. We also urge the state to adopt a comprehensive plan for prison closure such as CURB's Prison Closure Roadmap which provides recommendations for prison population reduction, selecting prisons for closure, supporting communities impacted by incarceration through a decarceral just transition, and prison repurposing.

WHAT WE OPPOSE

Wasteful Infrastructure Projects

CURB maintains that non-essential prison infrastructure spending without a comprehensive plan for prison closure is irresponsible. CURB is aware that many of California's state prisons are dilapidated and in need of repairs to ensure the health, safety, and accessibility of those inside. CURB does not oppose repairs to roofs, plumbing, HVAC systems or efforts to make rooms ADA compliant or more accessible or usable to families. We are however skeptical of projects like the \$360 million allocated to construction at San Quentin under the guise of rehabilitation for multiple reasons. First, the cost for the building plan is too expensive, a position echoed by the Governor's own advisory council. Second, San Quentin is the oldest state prison with unique environmental hazards and no emergency preparedness plans, making it a complex building site that should require more research. Lastly, money should be prioritized to community-led services inside and outside of prisons proven to be effective in meeting the needs of directly impacted people. We are aware of efforts from CDCR to use the California Model to justify unnecessary spending and construction projects, when that funding could be invested in other essential areas. CURB supports the SQAC's recommendation to reduce the construction cost of the new building 38 by at least one third. Instead of reallocating saved funds to other costly infrastructure, we advocate for a general shift in fiscal priorities towards community-led programs like reentry initiatives.

Increased CDCR Spending

Our state is facing a huge deficit – \$38 billion or more – and CDCR is a money pit. Despite reductions in prison populations and occupied prison beds, spending on corrections has continued to increase over the last decade. According to the proposed budget, California will save nearly \$700 million annually from closing prisons, yet CDCR will receive \$1 billion in new raises over the next three years. CURB opposes irresponsible money grab attempts by CDCR. We support shifting funds to areas like substance use treatment programs, bachelor's degree programs, transitional housing, and more that relate to the health, wellbeing, and safety of incarcerated people. CDCR has a clear way to reduce prison spending overall through prison closures of toxic, crumbling facilities.

If you would like to be added to CURB's mailing list to learn more about our work
or share your experiences you can write us at:

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