

Prison expansion plan shrinks

Last year's prison expansion plan is now projected to build 29 percent fewer beds than originally intended, according to figures that corrections officials released today.

Assembly Bill 900 had promised 53,000 new beds to help relieve overcrowding in California's prison system. The figures released today show that the \$7.9 billion plan passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will now pay for 37,600 beds.

California Department of Corrections Secretary Matt Cate and his construction chief, Deborah Hysen, said that higher construction costs and altered plans calling for more cells instead of dorms account for the lower number of beds.

A component of AB 900 to build 16,000 new beds at existing prisons and tie them to improved rehabilitation programs has been cut to 8,600.

Another portion of the bill to house 16,000 new "reentry" beds at mini-prisons located throughout the state has been downsized from 16,000 to 11,000 beds.

Hysen said the bill's plan for 13,000 new county jail beds has now been reduced to about 10,000.

AB 900 also contained about \$1 billion in what Cate described as "placeholder" funds to pay for 8,000 medical beds. The prison system's medical care receiver has since come up with his own \$7 billion plan to build 10,500 such beds. Cate said officials are still trying to work out discrepancies between the two plans.

Hysen had previously said the state hoped to break ground in December on two new prison housing facilities. She said today that it is now "more likely than not" that the state can begin the actual construction work on at least one site.

"We haven't given up," Hysen said.

None of the \$7.4 billion in bond money approved in AB 900 has yet been allocated by the State Public Works Board. Cate said the bonds can't be issued until the Legislature approves a clean-up bill to authorize AB 900's construction changes, which he said would remove a "cloud" that had been placed over them by an attorney general's opinion.

The Schwarzenegger administration offered the AB 900 construction plan as its main line of defense against a legal motion filed by inmates rights lawyers to cap the state's prison population.

The motion is scheduled for trial Nov. 17.

Read the corrections department's new strategy on overcrowding [here](#).

Posted by Andy Furillo on June 18, 2008 1:51 PM