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## Contra Costa, Alameda counties struggle to find space for influx of parolees

By Karl Fischer and Robert Salonga  
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A white bus leaves county jail in Martinez each week bound for San Quentin, full of parolees who messed up.

They stay in the state prison for four months on average, though some do the "full bullet" -- jail-speak for the state parole board's one-year maximum penalty for failing to stay out of trouble.

Come October, most revoked parolees will not be put on that bus, sent away toward their punishment. Nor will their stay in county jail approach a bullet, or even four months, before they return to their communities.

New state law pushes the handling and housing of most wayward parolees to local government, along with a host of new prisoners convicted of nonviolent felonies who will not set foot inside a state prison.

Most of the parolees will remain in local communities, serving 60- or 90-day jail terms instead of the average four-month prison term with the state.

Counties across California are grappling with the logistics of the law, and rue the lack of state dollars to pay for expanding their jail systems, probation departments and rehabilitation services. State funding so far only covers the most basic expansion for hundreds of prisoners and parolees traditionally served by the state and now expected to join the county system.

The expected influx numbers in the thousands. Alameda County, for example, expects 848 prisoners released from state prison during the next

three years to crowd its probation department. Including

future convictions, that number could swell from 1,200 to 1,800.

Both East Bay counties have put on a brave face about it. However, Contra Costa's agencies tasked with the transition can't even deliver a sustainable budget.

The projected cost for the proposed services is about \$7.3 million annually -- more than \$1 million more than the state's current funding formula would provide in the 2012-13 fiscal year.

"We will have a budget that is balanced for this implementation process over the next nine months," Contra Costa Probation Chief Philip Kader said. "We are not naive, but we remain guardedly optimistic that continued funding will increase as promised by the state. If the state does not, the level of service will obviously be adversely affected."

Still, the county must prepare for these added parolees and new convicts who will serve their entire terms in jail rather than prison, money or not.

Cities, meanwhile, must make do with no additional funding for policing, though the flow of parolees returning to Contra Costa County from the state this fiscal year is projected to grow by about 25 a month.

"In Richmond, frankly, it only takes one key person back on the streets to influence an entire cycle of

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violence and retaliatory activity," Richmond police Chief Chris Magnus said. "Cities need more resources to help individuals have a reasonable chance of making good decisions."

The committee working out the county's plan -- including Kader, Magnus, Sheriff David Livingston, District Attorney Mark Peterson, county Behavioral Health Chief Cynthia Belon, Public Defender Robin Lipetzky and Diana Becton, presiding judge of Contra Costa Superior Court -- will air it to the public in a series of meetings this week.

More than two-thirds of California parolees return to jail at some point during their parole term. Keeping people imprisoned and helping them stay clean when they get out costs a huge amount of money.

The state money to offset that cost falls short because it arrives according to the number of prisoners, and lengths of their commitments, that each county sends to the state.

Though Contra Costa ranks among California's largest counties -- with a busy court system to match -- it also ranks among the state leaders in finding alternatives to lengthy prison stays through programs intended to reduce recidivism. As a consequence of the county's success at diverting inmates from the state system, the \$4.5 million the county receives for the last nine months of the current fiscal year falls short of the need.

Alameda County faces much the same problem. Its initial \$9.2 million budget must stretch far enough to accommodate an additional 267 inmates on any given day, just for new convictions.

"The funding formula is fundamentally flawed," Alameda County Probation Chief David Muhammad said.

The actual need is difficult to estimate in both counties, because planners work only with projections and estimates of the number of prisoners and parolees they can expect.

The Contra Costa Sheriff's Office, which runs the county jail, plans to absorb more than half of those initial state dollars just to accommodate anticipated new prisoners and to expand its electronic monitoring system.

It also will lose money once paid by the state to house parolees waiting for that bus, which will no longer leave weekly for San Quentin. This fiscal year, that was \$777,000.

The sheriff must hire more than 15 deputies and other staff to supervise new prisoners, and will open mothballed jail units at West County Detention Facility in Richmond and Marsh Creek Detention Facility in Clayton to accommodate about 350 extra prisoners at any given time -- a total Undersheriff Michael Casten expects to be reached in about 90 days.

"It's going to increase the population dramatically," he said.

The Probation Department, meanwhile, will spend more than \$1 million of the state's initial money for additional supervision of prison-released and future parolees -- a population estimated to grow to nearly 500 a year. They will join the caseload of about 3,000 adult and 4,000 juvenile probationers in the county system.

The Health Services department takes nearly \$900,000 of the initial money to expand capacity and reserve space for added the new county obligation in drug and alcohol treatment programs, mental health service and temporary housing.

"One-stop centers, alcohol and drug programs, job readiness ... we owe it to the community to grow and create basic resources that will help lessen the likelihood that these guys re-offend," Magnus said. "I do not see how this process really puts forth

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those resources for the additional population that will be coming out early."

**Staff writer Angela Woodall contributed to this report. Reach Karl Fischer at 510-262-2728 or [kfischer@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:kfischer@bayareanewsgroup.com). Follow him at [Twitter.com/kfischer510](https://twitter.com/kfischer510).**

## Public Safety Realignment Act

- Most parolees with less serious convictions will serve time in county jail rather than prison if their parole is revoked, and for shorter periods.
- Less serious felony sentences now are served in county jail or through community alternatives to incarceration, rather than in state prison.
- Counties may use electronic monitoring, in lieu of bail, for some inmates awaiting trial.
- Decisions about parole revocation for all offenders covered under the act will be handled at the county level by July 2013.

If you go

To strengthen Contra Costa County's plan to meet new requirements of the Public Safety Realignment Act, three community forums are scheduled to present the plan and gather input from the community:

- 7 to 9 p.m. Monday at Antioch City Hall, Third and\*streets.
- 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday at the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors chamber, 651 Pine St., Room 107, Martinez.
- 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Richmond City Council chamber, 440 Civic Center Plaza.

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