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Sacramento County sheriff wants governor to delay shift of prisoners to counties

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Conceding he is "going rogue" shortly before the state is to start diverting prison inmates to county jails, Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones is calling on Gov. Jerry Brown to postpone the Oct. 1 realignment plan until problems can be worked out.

"I believe it will increase crime in virtually every community," Jones said in a recent interview with The Bee. "There's going to be more criminals on the streets, and the logical conclusion is there's going to be more crime."

Jones said he met twice in recent weeks with Brown to seek a delay because of his rising concerns that the plan still has a number of unanswered questions and potential problems, especially the lack of a permanent source of funding.

"The sheriffs are the only ones in this realignment that cannot back out if the funding goes away, because once we own these inmates we own them forever," Jones said.

A Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokeswoman said Thursday that the state already has postponed the realignment plan once, from July 1, and that officials plan to commence the shift as planned on Oct. 1.

"Everybody is getting ready for this," Terry Thornton said. "It's a huge part of getting the prison population reduced without releasing people early."

Under the planned realignment, responsibility for low-level offenders and parole violators will shift from the state to individual counties, with counties receiving funding to house the inmates and to provide rehabilitation programs for prisoners who are released.

The plan is a major part of the governor's effort to bring California's prison system into compliance with federal court rulings that have found it dangerously overcrowded. The shift of 32,000 inmates to the counties over the next two years is expected to provide a major relief valve to the state system.

Law enforcement groups and sheriffs have supported the plan but are concerned about funding. Jones emphasized that he believes realignment can work, but he is concerned it is being pressed into action only because of court deadlines.

"I'm not opposed to realignment, I'm not opposed to local control ... ," he said. "I'm for everything the governor's trying to do in this realignment."

But Jones said the fact that state officials have not been able to get a measure on the ballot to ensure permanent funding for the counties concerns him.

Officials estimate Sacramento County will receive 895 inmates transferred from prisons, though Jones concedes the actual numbers remain "a moving target" and that they will be stretched out over time.

Other sheriffs have expressed concerns about the plan, but they say it's clear they have to be ready for the inmates heading their in three weeks.

"It's like avoiding the dentist," said Merced County Sheriff Mark Pazin, president of the California State Sheriffs' Association. "At some point in time you've just got to go, and that's what we're doing."

Pazin was in the meetings Jones had with the governor and said he appreciates his fellow sheriff's concerns, but added that officials have been working with the state for months to come up with a workable plan.

He and others said Thursday that a postponement was not realistic.

"I agree with Scott on many of these issues, but postponing it is not going to make any difference," Yolo County Sheriff Ed Prieto said. "My feeling is, I don't know what we're going to gain from postponing."

Prieto said he is still waiting for firm figures on how many inmates to expect, but he expects realignment funding will allow him to hire 12 correctional officers. He said he expects some inmates to be shifted to home confinement and to fire camps, as well.

"We have to be really innovative and we're doing the best we can," Prieto said. "But it's law now. It's a done deal as far as I'm concerned."

In Placer County, Undersheriff Devon Bell said officials are expecting 100 to 300 additional inmates to come into the jail eventually as a result of realignment, and that funding for the first nine months of the program is slightly over \$3 million.

"We do have a certain sense that this is going to be a challenge for us," Bell said. "In Placer County, if you get stopped for drunk driving, you're probably going to do some jail time. If you get arrested for theft at the Galleria, you're probably going to do some jail time."

But, Bell added, officials are concerned that the shift of inmates may result in jail beds filling up, meaning some criminals will simply not be forced to serve time.

Bell said Placer County officials share Jones' concerns about the lack of permanent funding for realignment, but he said he is hesitant to call for a postponement of the Oct. 1 start.

Instead, he said, officials are meeting weekly to discuss how to make the plan work.

Jones said Sacramento officials have been doing the same for months, and added that if the state moves forward Oct. 1, he will be ready.

"I'm not standing up saying I'm not going to play," Jones said. "We're getting ready and we will make it work. On Oct. 2, if this is the law of the land, we will make it work."

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