



Public Safety Realignment

Weak State and County Oversight Does Not Ensure That Funds Are Spent Effectively

Background

To reduce prison overcrowding and help lower the State's incarceration costs, California enacted realignment laws in 2011 that shifted the responsibility for managing certain offenders, including both inmates and probationers, sentenced for nonviolent, nonserious, and non-sex crimes from the state prison system to county jails. To offset the costs counties incur for incarcerating, supervising, and rehabilitating these offenders, the State allocated more than \$6 billion in public safety realignment funds to counties in fiscal year 2019–20. To oversee realignment spending, each county has a Community Corrections Partnership committee (Partnership Committee). Further, the Board of State and Community Corrections (Corrections Board) provides statewide leadership in criminal justice and annually reports counties' realignment efforts to the Governor and the Legislature. We reviewed realignment spending at three counties: Alameda, Fresno, and Los Angeles.

Key Findings

- Because realignment required counties to house additional inmates even if they were already struggling with jail overcrowding, Fresno and Los Angeles have exceeded their jails' capacities despite releasing inmates early.
- All three counties lack facilities—such as classrooms and outdoor space—and resources they need to adequately provide certain educational and rehabilitative programs that prepare inmates to reenter the community.
- Mental health providers do not share sufficient information with the Alameda and Fresno jails to let them make decisions about inmate housing and supervision that will minimize the risks of violence, injury, or death.
- All three counties and their Partnership Committees limited their oversight to only a small portion of public safety realignment because they narrowly interpreted the scope of realignment funding.
 - » The counties lack comprehensive planning and oversight: Partnership Committees have only overseen and made budget recommendations for less than 20 percent of the funds received.
 - » Counties do not regularly evaluate their realignment services and programs and have underreported to the Corrections Board their public safety spending by at least 80 percent.
- The Corrections Board has failed to provide sufficient oversight of, and guidance to, the counties and, as a result, has reported inconsistent and incomplete information each year. Further, it has not fulfilled its duty of identifying best practices for counties to effectively implement realignment.

Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should amend state law to clearly identify the specific accounts it requires county Partnership Committees to plan for and oversee and for the Corrections Board to include in its reports.
- The Corrections Board should develop for counties' Partnership Committees guidance for reporting relevant financial information and a process to review and analyze realignment-related spending. It should also annually share best practices related to public safety realignment.
- The counties we reviewed should do the following to ensure appropriate inmate care and realignment spending:
 - » Take steps to address overcrowding in their jails while ensuring public safety.
 - » Conduct mental health screenings of all inmates upon admission to a county jail and require mental health care providers to share inmates' mental status with jail staff.
 - » Conduct evaluations of the effectiveness of realignment programs and services at least every three years.
 - » Annually review and make budget recommendations for all public safety realignment accounts and consistently report all related spending.