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LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION
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This brief statement is in response to questions posed by the staff of the Little Hoover Commission.

Among the many problems in the Corrections system, the ones pertaining to overcrowding and recidivism will never be solved without sentencing reform. Currently, there are no incentives for prisoners to modify their behavior. The recommendations from the Corrections Independent Review Panel on sentencing contained 39 specific proposals, such as:

1. Initiation of a presumptive sentencing policy where the majority of prisoners can substantially reduce their time in prison by successfully completing pre-agreed rehabilitation programs which include, but is not limited to, educational and/or vocational skills, drug and alcohol-related treatment and good behavior.
2. Reduce prison population through lower returns to custody.
3. Identify and release older inmates who pose no threat to society.
4. Expand educational and vocational programs.
5. Begin preparation for reentry to society at the time the inmate enters prison.
6. Charter a Sentencing Commission to develop a presumptive sentencing model.

Since none of these recommendations has been implemented, I strongly endorse and am part of the efforts of a new group, the Task Force On California Prison Crowding, comprised of leading authorities in the corrections field. The Task Force strongly advocates the creation of a Sentencing Commission.

There must be a seamless transition between entry into prison and reentry into society. Budgetary funds must be allocated to hire the teachers, counselors and staff sufficient to conduct all programs established to modify inmate behavior.

However, this will be useless unless there is a community and government effort to successfully integrate successful inmates back into society. This will necessitate new contracts and programs between the State and the Counties. It will also require a cultural change in attitude among parole officers. The mind-set must be

to keep most parolees out of jail, through education, job and residency assistance, rather than continuing to violate parole because of minor offenses. Parole officers should also spend most of their time on duty engaged with parolees who have committed violent offenses and/or continue to represent a danger to the community. Reducing recidivism is in the best interest of society as parolees would be committing fewer crimes.

Since the Corrections Independent Review panel issued its report on June 30, 2004, which contained 239 recommendations, few, if any of the major proposals have been implemented. With the exception of Senator Gloria Romero, no member of the Administration or Legislature, to my knowledge, has contacted the panel to discuss its recommendations.

As I have previously stated when I appeared before the Little Hoover Commission on January 26, 2005, no reform will ever be accomplished without a meaningful, major reorganization of the Department of Corrections. The previous reorganization was cosmetic at best, and the Department still does not have the capabilities to manage its fiscal, personnel, training and management development responsibilities. Now, more than ever, there is a need for a Civilian Corrections Commission to establish policy, ensure that the Secretary carries out that policy and act as a buffer between the Department and the Executive and Legislative branches.