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GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSALS ENDANGER PUBLIC SAFETY PROSECUTORS SAY

The California District Attorneys Association (CDAА) dispatched letters Friday to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the members of the California Legislature expressing its firm opposition to the proposed elimination of prosecution grant programs "in such critical areas as child abuse, gang violence, the proliferation of methamphetamine, crimes against our vital agricultural industry, and the escalating use of the Internet and technology to exploit children and the elderly."

"We recognize the magnitude of the unprecedented budget shortfall facing our state and the sacrifices necessary to put California's fiscal house in order," a letter to state legislators said, "however, we believe that many of the proposals contained in the Governor's budget disproportionately impact prosecutors, irrevocably damage public safety in California, and serve only to exacerbate our economic problems."

CDAА's letters were in response to the Administration's plans to completely eliminate funding from the Office of Emergency Services for such vital prosecution programs as Sexual Assault Felony Enforcement, Gang Violence Suppression Program, and the High Technology Theft Apprehension and Prosecution Program among others. CDAА noted that the 2008-09 budget already reduced expenditures by 10 percent in many of these programs and that the proposed complete elimination of the programs will lead to increased crime in California against our most vulnerable citizens.

In a second letter to Governor Schwarzenegger, prosecutors were highly critical of the Governor's plan to eliminate parole supervision for all non-serious, non-violent, and non-sex offenders. "Parole is an essential law enforcement tool enabling peace officers to search the persons, vehicles, and residences of parolees. Parole searches have saved innocent lives and prevented countless violent crimes. To unilaterally eliminate parole for thousands of prison inmates would constitute a public safety disaster."

CDAА derided the Governor's proposal to allow certain inmates to receive up to four months of additional credit – over and above the day-for-day credits already in place – for each rehabilitative program an inmate completes. The plan fails to define the content or duration of any of these programs and does not limit the number of programs in which an inmate can participate, CDAА said.

Both letters were signed by CDAА's 57 elected district attorneys and the Los Angeles City Attorney. CDAА reminded legislators and the Governor that he has repeatedly pledged that "the first duty and highest obligation of government, and my number one priority as Governor, is public safety."

“We cannot emphasize strongly enough,” prosecutors said, “that whatever short-term savings might be realized from these cuts will be dwarfed by a corresponding increase in criminal activity in these areas.”

Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse II, who helped draft the letters to legislators and the Governor for CDAA, said that “poorer counties, like Merced, will be especially hard hit by these cuts. We have one of the highest per capita crime rates in California, and are already stretched thin. We rely on state assistance to enable us to prosecute many of the more specialized cases such as gang violence and crimes against our farmers.”

“I hold the belief that protecting public safety is the first responsibility of government and would encourage residents who are concerned about increased crime to contact their representatives in Sacramento and the Governor’s office and urge them not to be penny wise and pound foolish when it comes to safeguarding the public,” Morse said.