

August 21, 2009
For Immediate Release

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District Attorney Warns Upcoming Assembly Vote Jeopardizes Public Safety

Bill Releases More Inmates, Reduces Penalties for Serious Crimes

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today warned that a vote on a proposed corrections department budget bill scheduled for Monday in the California State Assembly would reduce a number of serious crimes to misdemeanors, release inmates who have committed serious crimes early, and open the door to reduced sentences for sex offenders. The State Senate passed its version bill on Thursday, adding even more limitations on prosecutors without the benefit of public comment.

“Lawmakers are steamrolling this proposal through the legislature with last-minute changes and without a chance for the public and law enforcement to weigh in,” said DA Dumanis. “Permanent policy decisions are being made based on a temporary budget crisis. It’s short-sighted and it’s dangerous.”

The proposal converts the following crimes from felonies to misdemeanors: receiving stolen property, writing bad checks, commercial burglary and petty theft with a prior.

A sentence of years in state prison would be replaced by mandated sentence of no more than a year in county jail for those crimes, leading to what prosecutors call a “get out of prison free” card.

A repeat felon who is caught writing tens of thousands of dollars in bad checks would receive virtually no punishment. A chop-shop operator with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stolen cars in his possession would get no more than a few months in jail. Someone who fences expensive jewelry, computers, and other valuables stolen from someone’s residence won’t be going to prison.

The proposal also changes penalties for auto thieves by imposing a value of \$2500 or more in order for the crime to be a felony. That means if a criminal steals a Lexus, he can be charged with a felony and sent to prison. But if he steals a family’s old pickup truck (which may be their only means of transportation) it is just a misdemeanor.

“Perhaps worst of all, these changes would be permanent, even after the budget crisis is over. Criminals will realize that serious crimes would now carry no real consequences. Crime is

bound to increase. Drug addicts will be even more likely to fuel their habits by committing petty theft. And now, their penalty will be a slap on the wrist,” said Dumanis.

The bill also takes the responsibility for setting punishment ranges away from the legislature and gives it to a “sentencing commission.” It is a virtual certainty that changes made by this commission would further reduce the punishments for crimes. In fact, it opens the door for thirteen commission members to change mandatory sentencing for sex offenders and criminals who use with a gun.

“Law enforcement in California came to the table in the last several months with a viable alternative to such drastic measures,” said Dumanis. “We proposed a program that saved money but still preserved public safety. Unfortunately, our advice, expertise, and assistance have fallen on deaf ears.”

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