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Alameda County
Supervisor Keith Carson, Fifth District

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Opinion-Editorial

The Worst is Yet to Come

In 1967 the California State Legislature implemented the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, which allowed for the rapid release of state psychiatric patients; between 1969 and 1973 the population of State run psychiatric facilities dropped from 18,831 to approximately 7,000. Studies at that time showed a connection between the significant increase of mentally ill inmates in State prisons and those released from State Psychiatric facilities. On Tuesday, August 4th, a Federal three judge panel ordered the State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to develop a plan for the early release of over 40,000 inmates. Furthermore, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is considering the early release of 27,000 inmates as a cost cutting measure. While many believe the order by the three judge panel will be appealed, early release of inmates without a re-entry plan, to communities that don't have the essential supportive services is a reality we all must face.

The chickens are coming home to roost after nesting in California's ongoing decision not address its revolving door of incarceration. Until this year, The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has been spared the draconian cuts that have been endured by healthcare, and social services. One aspect of the problem is that since the state has cut the essential services the formerly incarcerated will need, local government and communities will be tasked with providing the necessary assistance, without adequate resources. The sick, the elderly and those who have less than a year to serve on their term will make up the 27,000 to be released in the state proposal. Since the state has eliminated the program in San Quentin that connects those leaving prison with primary care doctors and medication, the sick will find themselves in the Alameda County run emergency rooms, those budgets have also been slashed. A majority of the elderly will not be able to receive In Home Supportive Services, because those funds have been decimated; this program provides individuals with basic domestic services that allow them to stay at home, instead of utilizing more expensive nursing homes. Those who are returning home with less than a year to serve will not be able to find a job or get assistance with their drug or alcohol issues (which is an overwhelming majority of people in prison) because the state has slashed those programs.

Alameda County will cut their budget by over \$200 million. Such reductions will make it impossible for us to provide the services that formally incarcerated people need and deserve. I am a strong advocate for releasing people from prison that do not threaten public safety. I am not supportive of the cost cutting dumping policy that is about to hit our communities. We are still experiencing the fallout from the release of patients from psychiatric hospitals 40 year ago; we can expect the same with early release. While we do not know how many inmates will be released to Alameda County, we do know that our communities will be at risk, while there will be many individuals and community leaders that will piece together what ever assistance they can provide, our governmental system will be woefully inadequate in providing a network of services that will give the formally incarcerated a fighting chance to succeed. I guarantee you the worst is yet to come.

Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson represents the Fifth District which includes Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, Piedmont, and parts of Oakland (North Oakland, Rockridge, Grand Lake, Fruitvale, and Dimond District neighborhoods).

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