

Valley jails get boost in funding thanks to realignment

By Marc Benjamin

Valley counties will get more money in coming years for jail programs after negotiations led to a change in the state prison realignment funding formula.

Among the issues new to the state formula were poverty and the effects of state prisons on counties where they are located. San Joaquin Valley counties are home to about one-third of the state's penitentiaries.

The new formula will bring millions of dollars to Valley counties, according to the California State Association of Counties.

That money can be used to add bed space and programming that will keep inmates from returning to jail or prison, officials said.

Fresno County will get an additional \$4.2 million next year, an increase of about 16%. For the current budget year, Fresno County will get \$25.6 million.

"We deliberated on this for about two years and came up with this formula," said John Navarrette, Fresno County administrative officer, one of nine top county officials negotiating the formula change. "We perceive that we will do far better than under prior allocations."

State prison realignment, which went into effect three years ago, became necessary after a three-judge panel required that California reduce its prison population and meet medical needs of inmates. The realignment program put inmates in county jails for crimes that previously would have landed them in prison.

Other central Valley counties also will prosper under the new formula.

Each county can increase its funding by keeping criminals out of state prison, which likely will require adding bed space, but more importantly, improving inmate programs, said Larry Spikes, Kings County administrative officer, who also sat on the county association committee.

"The future," he said, "will be tied to performance, which is defined as how well you are doing in avoiding sending people to state prison."

That performance also will determine a portion of the funding. It will be measured against all the other counties, Spikes said.

The California State Association of Counties offered to have its members negotiate the terms of the formula, said Elizabeth Howard Espinosa, a senior legislative representative for the association.

Under the plan, negotiators decided "within the (county) family how to divide up the resources," she said.

The state Department of Finance, which disburses money to the counties, agreed on the formula devised by the county association's negotiators, Howard Espinosa said.

VALLEY COUNTIES GET BOOST IN STATE MONEY FOR JAILS

2014/15, 2015/16, Difference

Fresno \$25.6, \$29.8, 16%

Madera \$4.5, \$5.3, 16.5%

Kings \$7.2, \$8.2, 13.2%

Tulare \$13.7, \$15.3, 12%

(In millions)

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