

Supes vote on prison inmate influx

By Joe Johnson

Kings County supervisors approved a committee-made plan this week to help deal with the coming influx of state prison inmates.

The plan is in response to California's Public Safety Realignment Bill, which aims to reduce the state budget by shifting responsibility for housing nonserious, nonviolent and nonsexual inmates to the state's 53 counties.

"We've got more than 300 state inmates coming into our jurisdiction, and we all need to work together to make sure the money lasts," county Supervisor Joe Neves said. "This plan is how we do that."

Contrary to popular belief, the realignment bill will not relocate current inmates from state prison to county jails. Instead, low-level offenders will be sentenced to serve time in the counties where they are convicted instead of at a state institution.

But pushing the burden onto the counties is creating a new set of problems for already-underfunded county governments.

"We have two trains going in opposite directions, and both are heading for problems," Neves said. "The state needs to reduce their inmate population, but our county

jails are capped and full. We can provide these people with better rehab closer to home, but our resources and staffing are limited. It's a real problem."

In the plan agreed upon by local law enforcement, Chief Probation Officer Steve Brum is rolling out an expanded electronic monitoring program to release 100 offenders with GPS tracking bracelets.

This will help ease the burden on the Kings County Jail, which is already filled to capacity with 361 inmates and little extra room to house new guests.

Sheriff Dave Robinson proposed adding 80 bunk beds to the facility and dividing two inmate yards in half to increase the jail population cap to 441.

This short-term fix will provide space for 80 more inmates while local officials wait to see if additional funding is made available for housing.

"We've only been given about \$2.8 million to work with over the next nine months," Neves said. "After that, nothing is set in stone. We really can't plan too far ahead because we don't know what's coming next. Hopefully, we are next in line to get the additional pods built on the Kings County Jail. But we have to wait and see."

