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Sheriff says Brown's plan to transfer state prisoners could burst San Mateo County jails

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REDWOOD CITY -- Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to thin the state's prison population could mean an increase of up to 40 percent in the number of prisoners in San Mateo County's lockups by the end of a year, the sheriff said.

"It would be a true crisis," said Sheriff Greg Munks. "We can't hold that many people."

San Mateo County's jails were already at 120 percent over capacity in January, with an average of 1,001 inmates housed in facilities that are supposed to hold 834, according to a report Munks is slated to deliver to the Board of Supervisors Criminal Justice Committee on Monday.

He said the governor's proposal to transfer state prisoners to county jails would put public safety at risk because there wouldn't be enough money and space to keep all the inmates behind bars.

But how many new prisoners might be added to county jails is far from certain. Munks said local law enforcement officials are pushing the governor to reconsider his plan or give them more funding. And Brown is working with the leaders of California's

counties to find a plan they can live with, said Oscar Hidalgo, spokesman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

As part of his plan to plug California's \$25.4 billion budget hole, Brown has proposed making prisoners convicted of offenses that aren't serious, violent or sex-related the responsibility of county jails. At present, anyone who gets a sentence of a year or more is sent to

state prison. According to state figures, about 37,000 inmates per year fall into this category.

San Mateo County's share would be about 33 more prisoners a month. But because each of the inmates would be serving, on average, 21 months behind bars, that number would compound each month. So, after 12 months, San Mateo County would be housing an extra 396 prisoners, Munks said.

That could lead to the county having to consider releasing some inmates in order to make room for others.

"The governor's proposal, as it currently stands, is not workable absent some significant assistance from the state to house these new prisoners," said Munks. "It would adversely affect public safety."

Hidalgo, the department of corrections spokesman, said keeping prisoners close to home could actually improve safety and save money. He said an inmate who is sent back to state prison for a minor parole violation might only be there for four months.

That time is long enough for the state to spend money on medical and psychological tests for a new prisoner. It also means pulling someone out of whatever social services they are enrolled in at the time.

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"You take them away from what they have started doing," Hidalgo said.

Munks agreed with the idea of keeping prisoners close to local services, at least in theory.

He said the jail population can be reduced in part by providing services that keep people out of prison.

The other means of handling more prisoners would be more jail space in San Mateo County, he said.

But the proposed new jail won't open for at least three years, and funding for the \$155 million project must still be worked out.

The sheriff would like to see some of the money for it come from the state.

"If you are going give us these inmates, you've got to help us," said Munks.

The Criminal Justice Committee meets at 11:30 a.m. Monday in the board conference room in the Hall of Justice at 400 County Center in Redwood City.

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jail overcrowding in San Mateo County facilities
Here's what would happen on the Peninsula if Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to move state prisoners into county jails were implemented:

More prisoners: San Mateo County jails would be required to take an estimated 33 more prisoners per month under the governor's plan.

Compounded problem: In 12 months, jails would be housing 396 extra inmates. In January, they were already 120 percent over capacity.

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