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## State promises major reforms for juveniles

CROWDED, VIOLENT FACILITIES TARGETED

By Don Thompson  
Associated Press

**SACRAMENTO** - California will have to revamp the way it incarcerates juvenile offenders by using smaller and more modern lockups to replace the warehouse-style prisons it currently uses, according to a court-mandated report from the state corrections department.

The report marks a compromise between the state and a non-profit legal center and is the latest indication of how attempts to solve systematic problems in the state's corrections department will end up costing California taxpayers. The state already faces hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs to reform its adult prison system and the way it manages inmate health care.

The juvenile reforms stem from a lawsuit filed in 2003 by the San Francisco-based Prison Law Office. The non-profit organization alleged that California's youth prisons were plagued by crowding and violence, with wards routinely locked in cages and staff members administering prescription drugs more commonly than counseling.

In a settlement filed this week in Alameda County Superior Court, the Division of Juvenile Justice committed itself to a four-year plan to change the way it houses and treats young criminals.

The state committed itself to housing no more than 38 wards in any of its housing units, some of which were designed to hold 70, said Bernard Warner, chief of the juvenile division within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. In the short term, that will require changing the way existing housing units are used.

Other immediate changes include new treatment programs for wards, training for employees to reduce the use of force and the level of violence within the institutions, and programs to help wards integrate back into society before they are released.

“Kids are going to be given a lot more rehabilitation and program services, they're going to be out of their cells and active more of the day, they're going to have a lot more staff,” said Don Specter, director of the Prison Law Office. “If they do that and do it right, the (juvenile division) should look less like a prison and be more of a place where they go to learn and get programming.”

The state filed a previous reform plan in December that the Prison Law Office found inadequate. Subsequent negotiations produced the settlement filed this week.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger characterized the settlement as a positive step in resolving the many problems within California's corrections system.

Asked whether the state can afford all the recommended reforms, spokeswoman Margita Thompson said, “The bottom line is: We have a crisis and we need to address it.

“The overriding concern needs to be public safety and doing everything we can to focus on rehabilitating a

population that is going to be released into California's communities."

Juvenile reform efforts also will get a boost from the state budget for the current fiscal year, which includes \$100 million for various initiatives. Among them: hiring as many as 800 new employees, which will increase staffing levels by 21 percent; improving living quarters and classrooms for the system's roughly 3,000 wards; and designing a 260-bed juvenile center.

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