

OPERATIONALIZING TRANSFORMATION:

ADVANCING THE GOALS OF THE SAN QUENTIN TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom created the San Quentin Transformation Initiative and Advisory Council, tasked with “assisting the administration in delivering on the Governor’s announcement to transform San Quentin State Prison by 2025 into a one-of-a-kind rehabilitation center focused on improving public safety through rehabilitation and education via a scalable ‘California Model’ that can be utilized across the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).”

This document is intended to build on the work of the Governor’s Advisory Council by providing further analysis and detailed recommendations; its purpose is to provide a roadmap to support the Initiative’s next stages. Its intended audience includes CDCR leadership; San Quentin administrators and staff; the incarcerated community; legislators and staff, service providers (including nonprofit organizations and other partners); the philanthropic community, members of the media, and any other individuals or stakeholder groups committed to the successful transformation of San Quentin. The ideas presented here are solely the views, opinions, and recommendations of the author, not necessarily of other members of the Governor’s Advisory Council, or any other parties.

This document’s primary objective is to initiate a comprehensive process of analysis and planning that culminates in a detailed master work plan to guide the Initiative’s next stages of work. **Most immediately, however, the recommendations outlined in Section I: Transforming San Quentin’s Physical Infrastructure, call for a review of the state’s current plan to demolish Building 38 – a 70,000 square foot former furniture factory built in 1939 – and construct a new building complex on those grounds. It also presents an alternative plan that would not only expand program space, but improve the prison’s physical environment, and address critical staffing needs – all at lower cost, more quickly and efficiently, and with a vastly reduced environmental burden.**

Specifically, all construction projects at San Quentin should be carried out in a manner that reflects the State of California’s recent revisions to the [Green Building Standards Code](#) of Title 24 mandating embodied carbon analysis and [Life Cycle Assessments \(LCA\)](#) and corresponding limitations on embodied carbon for certain buildings. Before taking further steps to demolish Building 38, San Quentin should conduct a Life Cycle Assessment of embodied carbon emissions, comparing a replacement building scenario with a renovation scenario.

The document is divided into four sections, each addressing one critical aspect of the Initiative: 1) Transforming San Quentin’s physical infrastructure; 2) Developing quality programs and services; 3) Improving CDCR policies, practices, and operating procedures; 4) Advancing staff development and support. Each section presents an overview of the current landscape, followed by specific recommendations. In many cases, the key recommendations are for further research, analysis, and planning.

INTRODUCTION

The Governor's Initiative holds tremendous promise for altering the lives of tens of thousands of Californians. The selection of San Quentin allows it to capitalize on the prison's strong foundation of existing programs and staff culture, while tapping into the Bay Area's vast human and material resources.

Transforming a prison is an enormously complex and multifaceted process that requires a clear vision, skilled leadership, precise objectives, explicit guiding principles, a painstaking planning process, careful budgeting and financial management, highly coordinated implementation, and data-informed feedback and iteration. It also depends on the active engagement of the incarcerated community, as well as prison staff. The expertise of those "on the ground" regarding challenges and solutions, and their investment in truly effecting institutional transformation, will be critical to its success.

In the context of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, creating a model for the *process* of transformation will be at least as significant as the operational model that is ultimately created for San Quentin. This process – of bringing together key stakeholders and experts; conducting on-the-ground research regarding site-specific needs and challenges; confronting entrenched bureaucratic or political obstacles; devising viable strategies; and laying out detailed plans with realistic timelines – will serve the long-term project of systemic reform by providing a blueprint that other institutions can follow.

Establishing a transparent and methodical process – including the sound stewardship of all financial resources – will also be critical for garnering broad-based support among key stakeholders, and advocating for long-term financial investment of public and private resources. Every step will establish the reputation, and lay the groundwork, for the larger project of transforming CDCR.

The recommendations outlined in this document are based on my 23 years of professional experience leading a higher education program inside San Quentin, working closely with incarcerated people, line staff, administrators, volunteers, and other service providers. Throughout that time, I have studied numerous potential solutions to the problem of insufficient program space. I have also observed countless construction projects managed by CDCR and/or General Services.

During this time I have also witnessed political dynamics between the Governor's Office, the legislature, CDCR, the media, and the general public, lead to adverse outcomes for people living and/or working inside the institutions. **In the current moment, I believe the time pressure created by the Governor's ambitious timeline for construction of a new building at San Quentin, combined with other factors, has undermined the quality of the planning process, including the thorough consideration of alternative strategies. Given that the entire \$360 million budget for the San Quentin Transformation Initiative is presently allocated solely for this one demolition and construction project, it seems imperative that the plan be well-vetted and assured of success before it proceeds.**

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

For decades, San Quentin has been the site of a steadily evolving experiment in prison reform. Its location – in the heart of the densely populated and affluent Bay Area, surrounded by colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, cultural institutions, and social service agencies – has long provided a steady supply of volunteers, philanthropic funding, media attention, and community support. As a result, people incarcerated at San Quentin have benefited from access to educational opportunities, advocacy partnerships, recovery support, cultural events, and other programming. They have also experienced a social climate that is far less racist and violent than most other CDCR institutions.

Nevertheless, San Quentin has long suffered from limited program space, inconsistent institutional logistical support for programs, dilapidated infrastructure, poor internal communications, the absence of coordination or planning between state-run and volunteer programs and services, and high staff and administrative turnover. Like most CDCR institutions, San Quentin has also struggled with institutional rules, regulations, and local operating procedures that are ambiguous, contradictory, and/or frequently at odds with the Department’s stated rehabilitative mission. The result has been the inefficient utilization of community resources; compromised program quality; frustration among incarcerated people, service providers, and staff; and vast unmet demand for programs.

Thus, while San Quentin is in far better shape than most other CDCR institutions in terms of overall social climate and general access to programs, it has long underperformed relative to its potential. In addition, San Quentin has never had formal systems in place to document and evaluate the myriad programs operating there, or to analyze and disseminate knowledge about their impact. The current Initiative thus presents an extraordinary opportunity for San Quentin to live up to its potential – in the service of the incarcerated population, the practitioner community, CDCR, policymakers, and the public at large.

CORE CHALLENGES

The greatest challenges facing the Initiative's success will be: state budgetary constraints; unsteady levels of public and political support for investment in reform; the intractable bureaucracies of CDCR and state government; and adjacent political efforts to siphon off resources by incorporating projects or agendas that are beyond its scope. **Given these challenges, chief among the following recommendations is the formation of a leadership working group led by individuals with relevant expertise and experience, political independence, and no conflicts of interest, to oversee a comprehensive process of analysis and planning.**

Some challenges and solutions outlined here are relatively straightforward and widely agreed upon, and can be managed by open communication and transparent, logical planning. **Other more complex problems, however, will require the creation of dedicated specialized sub-working groups with the time and expertise to assess needs, identify challenges, establish goals, and devise strategy.** In order to safeguard the integrity and legitimacy of the entire Initiative, all processes must be transparent, methodical, and shielded from undue political influences and pressures.

Among the Initiative's most complex and costly dimensions will be the process of creating new space for programs and improving the physical condition of the prison. This work in particular will require transparent and methodical planning that meaningfully engages all stakeholders. Above all, any proposed demolition projects (e.g., Building 38; East Block) will need to be analyzed carefully, and alternatives thoroughly explored. **All proposed construction projects must be similarly vetted, specifically within the context of the institution's current needs and priorities, and with an eye towards potential unintended political, logistical, economic, or environmental impacts.** Otherwise, indefensible costs, environmental hazards, and/or political backlash may undermine the entire Initiative, and even the broader movement towards reform.

Another significant challenge will be the strategic development of needed programs and services, combined with safeguarding them over time through an institutional culture that values expertise, professionalism, and genuine care. Those overseeing this work will need experts from across relevant fields to conduct a landscape scan; determine what programs are needed; devise strategies for filling gaps in programming; and create systems of support, oversight, and accountability.

None of these tasks is simple, but the potential payoffs are critical, and the tools and systems designed in each realm will form the basis for further initiatives at institutions across CDCR.

VISION STATEMENT

Through the San Quentin Transformation Initiative, San Quentin will become a model institution that promotes the educational and professional development, mental health, and well-being of all members of its community. It will also advance public knowledge and engagement, foster innovation in public policy and criminal justice, and build bridges through dialogue across traditional divides.

KEY GOALS

High-quality programs and services that are available to every individual

- Abundant quality programs and services, with adequate space to accommodate their core functions and related activities
- Integrated systems for individualized assessment, advising, and placement, from entry through release, supported by strong data management systems and skilled staff
- Peer-facilitated orientation and mentoring systems

Staff who actively advance an institutional culture of mutual respect, personal growth, and healing

- Recruitment and retention of highly skilled, professional, and committed staff who are invested in San Quentin's mission
- Robust training, supervision, and resources that allow staff to support the wellbeing of the incarcerated community, themselves, and their peers

Rational, efficient, and productive administrative systems that advance a culture of health and wellbeing

- Institutional operations that maximize productivity, reduce conflict, and minimize disruption of programs
- CDCR policies and procedures that are fully aligned with San Quentin's new mission
- Excellent systems of communication, both internal and external, including incarcerated people, prison staff and administration, and other key stakeholders

Infrastructure and facilities that support the mission of the institution

- Adequate space to support plentiful quality programs
- Physical environment that promotes the health and dignity of incarcerated people and staff
- Onsite staff housing and other facilities that support the institution's goals related to staff recruitment, retention, and wellness
- A health-promoting physical environment for the entire community, including access to healthy food and clean water

Processes for systemwide data-driven accountability and transparency

- Comprehensive systems, adequate skilled personnel, and on-going collaborations to support rigorous research and evaluation
- Development of plans for system-wide scale-up of best practices developed at San Quentin, with the goal of implementing change at all CDCR institutions

SECTION I

TRANSFORMING SAN QUENTIN'S PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Investment in the physical infrastructure of San Quentin will be essential to achieving three of the Initiative's most critical goals: 1) Increasing program space; 2) creating a healthy and dignified living and working environment; and 3) maintaining a highly qualified workforce, both custody and non-custody. **All of these goals can be attained without the demolition of existing buildings or walls at San Quentin.**

First, the lack of space at San Quentin has long been an obstacle to the provision of programs sufficient for the entire population. It has also prevented the institution from taking full advantage of the vast available local resources. Efforts to renovate existing spaces have for decades encountered myriad bureaucratic and/or budgetary obstacles, or lack of political will.

San Quentin has also long suffered from neglect of its basic infrastructure, including the deferral of basic maintenance and regular cleaning, primarily as a result of staffing shortages and budgetary limitations. Yet clean, well-ventilated housing units with functioning basic infrastructure are critical to physical health, mental health, institutional social climate and morale, and staff/IP relations. These also have a profound impact on the moral legitimacy of the institution, in the eyes of both staff and IPs.

In addition, the cost of housing in and around Marin County is the single greatest obstacle to staff recruitment and retention at San Quentin, and thus to the basic operation of the institution. Many staff commute (often via carpool) as much as four hours per day. The cost of commuting is not only a major financial burden; time lost in travel also leaves little room for family responsibilities, much less the basic elements of a healthy lifestyle. An estimated 120 staff live on grounds in a trailer park without water, a sewage system, or electrical access.

As a result of this landscape, San Quentin has long suffered from persistent staffing vacancies in a broad array of key institutional functions, including physical plant, IT support, and food services. It also suffers from the resulting high rate of staff turnover, low morale, and lack of social cohesion across prison staff. Shortages of custody staff also periodically lead to overreliance on voluntary and involuntary overtime, which in turn lead to staff exhaustion and burnout.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase program space:

- Construction of a new education building with minimum ten classrooms in the open space behind the wall near 13-Wall Post (site of the former car repair vocational program area).
- Seismic upgrade and renovation of Building 38, the old furniture factory. Development of a public-private partnership should be explored as a strategy to reduce cost and expedite the process.
- Renovation of Building 32 (the old laundry building/Building B): at minimum: add drop ceiling, new windows, ventilation system, sprinklers.

Improve living conditions in the housing units:

- HVAC systems
- Improved lighting
- New PA systems, including multiple speakers in each unit
- Repairs to toilets and sinks
- Deep cleaning (plumbing chases, rooves, windows and guard rails)
- New paint throughout
- Screens on windows (to allow them to open while keeping out birds)

Support staff recruitment, retention, and wellness:

- Construct a new staff housing complex (50-100 apartments) on the former SQ Ranch site
- Improve staff trailer park by adding water, sewage system, gas, and electrical access
- Create new staff locker room and fitness center
- Increase availability of healthy food by improving staff “snack bar” and extending hours
- Refurbish each unit’s officer stations to create work space with adequate lighting
- Create staff rest area on sixth tier of North Block, including cameras
- Replace defective elevators in Medical Building and in North Block

Treat residents' loved ones with dignity, and strengthen family ties:

- Add five new family visiting trailers
- Improve current visiting room (paint, new furniture, improved food access/area, remove holding modules as possible, make environment more child friendly)
- Renovate visitors' bathroom outside East Gate

Transform East Block into a “centerpiece” Earned Living Unit:

- Upgrade plumbing and lighting fixtures (i.e., sinks and toilets, add reading lights)
- Improve existing chapel for use as multipurpose space
- Improve lighting and paint throughout
- Convert back yard behind East Block into outdoor common visiting area, add landscaping

Other renovations and improvements, and deferred maintenance:

Kitchens and dining halls

- Renovate food prep and service areas for provision of more fresh, healthful food
- New paint
- Remove birds nesting areas and create barriers (To be completed annually)
- Add drop ceilings and sound dampening materials

Lower yard

- Add grass and other landscaping throughout
- Improve outdoor toilets for greater privacy

Upper yard

- Remove East Block walk-along cages
- Improve roofing, to maintain shelter from rain and sun
- Create a walking path around perimeter to allow staff/residents easy access to exercise
- Renovate the Canteen
- Provide outdoor toilets with privacy for residents

Throughout institution

- Install fresh drinking water stations around the yard and other common areas
- Add benches throughout to provide seating options for elderly/disabled people, enabling them to rest safely and maintain dignity during alarms
- Add landscaping (including trees)

Beyond the improvements outlined here:

- The new emphasis on dynamic security, as opposed to reliance on static security strategies, will require the installation of additional cameras throughout the institution (beyond those already mandated by the courts).
- An ADA review of the entire institution should identify strategies for improving access for individuals with mobility limitations and other disabilities. Specifically, extensive resurfacing will be necessary in order to meet the standards of a level terrain institution.
- In order to facilitate access from the lower yard to the upper yard without taking stairs, installation of an external or otherwise easily accessible elevator will be required.
- Increasing custody coverage for all program areas will be a key strategy for expanding the programming capacity of the institution. For this reason, a review of current custody coverage of program space (along with the review of other staffing to ensure smooth and efficient institutional operations) will be essential.

SECTION II

EXPANDING QUALITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Among the most critical components of the transformation of San Quentin will be developing and maintaining quality programs and coordinated delivery systems. This process will require the active participation of individuals with expertise in the key program areas, representatives of the incarcerated community and other key stakeholder groups, experienced facilitators, and skilled project managers. The core components of this process are outlined below.

Beyond creating strong programs and delivery systems, this component of the Initiative will require the creation of a standing oversight body, to safeguard the quality of programs in perpetuity.

The main purpose of prison programs and services is to provide opportunities for intellectual and academic development; mental and physical health and wellness (including addiction recovery, recreation, and creative activities); workforce readiness (for livable wage employment); life skills development; restorative justice; civic engagement; and other reentry-specific needs.

In order to uphold the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of programs, and to advance the new mission of San Quentin, the administration of programs must be characterized by appropriate levels of expertise and training, professionalism, and mutual respect.

Although San Quentin is known for its plentiful programs compared to other CDCR institutions, significant gaps currently exist in their quality, availability, accessibility, and coordination. Programming inside CDCR is typically provided by state employees, third party contractors, and/or volunteer organizations. While the institution is primarily responsible for adult basic education and vocational training programs, outside volunteer organizations also supplement these programs. Addiction recovery programs are provided both by contracted service providers and by outside volunteers (e.g., AA, NA, etc.) Recreational and arts programming is provided both by the state (typically via contract) and by volunteer organizations. Myriad other activities are provided on an ad hoc basis by volunteer organizations or partner institutions.

Institution-wide, there is little substantive coordination or communication between programs provided by these different entities. More importantly, there is no “master planning” or institution-wide assessment process to ensure that the needs of the population as a whole are being addressed, or that programs are meeting appropriate standards of quality and accountability.

In the realm of addiction treatment (both pre-and post-release) as well as reentry housing, contracts are subject to little if any external review.

Amongst volunteer programs, access is extremely haphazard, and often based on personal connections rather than formal, equitable procedures. Likewise, while the Community Resources Manager's Office is responsible for coordinating the logistics associated with volunteer programs, it is not sufficiently staffed or equipped to vet programs, either on the basis of demand or the basis of quality.

Challenges within CDCR-provided educational programs include: lack of adequate program space, difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified instructors and supervisors, and gaps between the educational needs of the population and the standard operation and staffing of educational programs. For example, CDCR employs few instructors or learning specialists with expertise in learning disabilities; nor does it test the incarcerated population for LD's, or provide adequate support for those who have them.

Furthermore, many incarcerated people avoid being assigned to daytime education programs because they need the meager wages provided by regular prison jobs, along with frequent scheduling conflicts between work opportunities and education programs.

Given this context, key recommendations are as follows:

- 1. Conduct a landscape analysis of existing programs and services** at San Quentin to a) determine the program needs of the population as a whole, and assess whether those needs are being met; b) analyze specific obstacles to the availability of sufficient programs; and c) develop recommended strategies to address these obstacles. For example, pay scales may need to be adjusted; new staff positions, created; more robust recruitment strategies, devised; working conditions or facilities, improved; more or better data collected to enable institution-wide and program specific evaluation, etc. Given that such conditions evolve continually – as does the population itself – these functions should ultimately be taken over by the standing oversight body, and conducted on an ongoing basis.

2. Develop a comprehensive assessment, advising, placement, and support system

to ensure that each individual incarcerated person is engaged in those programs most appropriate to their individual needs, interests, and goals, and that they receive appropriate support (or “case management”) over time. Such a system will require sufficient appropriately qualified and trained staff (likely new positions and/or “trained up” counselors); an institution-wide data management system; and extensive systems for communication and coordination between prison staff, administrators, and state-run as well as external program providers.

Initial assessment, advising, placement, and referrals should address each individual's needs, interests, and goals in the following areas:

- *Academic education (including learning disabilities, and educational goals post release)*
- *Vocational training*
- *Mental health, including drug treatment/recovery*
- *Arts and cultural activities*
- *Languages*
- *Faith-based programming*
- *Life skills (including technology, and financial literacy)*
- *Parenting*
- *Relationships/intimacy*
- *Restorative Justice programming (including victim offender dialogue)*

Reentry-specific needs:

- *Housing*
- *Employment*
- *Identification card/Driver's license*
- *Social security*
- *IRS*
- *Financial planning (including establishing bank accounts, etc.)*
- *Addiction treatment/supportive housing*
- *Family reunification*
- *Legal services (including child custody, child support, deportation concerns, etc.)*

The success of the case management support system will rely heavily on the creation of a new comprehensive data management system that integrates CDCR-run and volunteer-led programs and services. The strength of this data management system will be critical to assessment, advising and placement, as well as research and evaluation activities. These systems and practices will also require extensive staff training, supervision, and support.

3. Create durable systems to safeguard program quality

All new programs offered within San Quentin, regardless of provider, should undergo a review process that examines: the given program's purpose, content/curriculum, intended participants, eligibility criteria, length and frequency, qualifications of service providers, and the enrollment process. **Existing programs should undergo an annual review** that includes (in addition to the above): direct observation, program evaluation by participants, and quantitative reporting on participation, enrollment processes, and outcomes.

Such systems for review and oversight should also be developed and maintained for contracted programs, regardless of funding sources, including reentry drug treatment programs and transitional housing.

Critical to promoting and sustaining program quality will also be the development of orientation and training programs (including curriculum, trainer training, and delivery systems) for both state and non-state employee service providers. This work will entail a review of existing systems for supervision, oversight, and accountability, and the development of recommendations for their improvement.

CDCR policies and procedures, as well as standard practices, also strongly impact the quality and efficacy of programs. Five key areas within this realm should be addressed through individual analysis and planning projects: Education, Mental Health, Reentry, Workforce Development, and Prison Work and Compensation. Each of these projects should engage prison staff and administrators, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, and outside experts – all with related expertise and/or experience.

a. Education

This process should assess the current state of education programming at San Quentin, including adult basic education, GED, ESL, and college, including those provided by CDCR and by external partners. It should ultimately produce recommendations for strengthening the quality of instruction, curriculum, supplies and materials, and access to technology and library resources, as well as integrating systems of support throughout each individual's educational path.

Many individuals incarcerated inside CDCR who need academic education do not receive it. Many have undiagnosed (or diagnosed) learning disabilities, or other psychological, developmental, or neurological obstacles to learning. Few among them have had access to formal evaluation; even fewer have access to instructors who are able to provide appropriate instruction and support. Essential to this work will thus be reviewing and overhauling: systems for student assessment and placement; the recruitment, training, and supervision of instructors; and the material and psychological incentives and disincentives for engaging in education.

b. Mental Health

This process should develop integrated strategies for supporting the mental health and wellness of all incarcerated people at San Quentin. It should shift, or at least complement, the traditional institutional approach to mental health services whereby only those who are designated as experiencing some significant form of mental illness are eligible for intensive support. The operating premise should be that each individual has mental health needs that must be assessed and tended to in a manner appropriate to that individual. Care may or may not include regular contact with a mental health clinician; people with histories of (or current issues with) addiction, for example, may benefit from different programs or groups. Creating systems of care, including safe support groups, for individuals with especially stigmatized mental health needs and/or commitment offenses should be a key priority.

Creating comprehensive systems for assessment, placement, and support will require significant clinical and administrative staffing, as well as expanded programming. It will also require exceptional communication and collaboration in case management, as well as in advising and support services. Effective data management systems that allow for a high level of discretion and confidentiality will also be essential.

Finally, this process will require an analysis of obstacles and disincentives to individuals' seeking or accepting mental health care, and recommendations for overcoming them. Challenges may include Board of Parole Hearings access to clinical records, social stigma/isolation, scheduling conflicts, communication challenges, and cultural and/or language barriers.

c. Reentry

This process will require an analysis of current reentry planning, placement, supervision, and support systems, and as well as recommendations for their improvement. A central goal should be ensuring that all possible needs are assessed, planned for, and/or addressed prior to release.

Institutional planning and support systems must be well-coordinated both with outside service providers and with CDCR Paroles Division. Just as quality assessment, placement, and advising systems will be essential to life inside the institution, they will also be critical to supporting successful reentry.

Specific attention should be paid to the process through which paroling individuals are assigned to housing; the management of requests for change of county; and how the specific terms of contracts between CDCR and specific providers, and how these impact individuals on parole.

This work will also entail a review of the parole process, with the goal of improving communication between the Parole Board, the lifer community, and the institution. This should include interviews and surveys with Board commissioners; Parole agents and other Paroles staff; lifers at San Quentin who have been denied parole; and former lifers who have been paroled from San Quentin, seeking input on what challenges exist, and how the process might be improved.

d. Workforce Development

This realm of programming inside CDCR should operate closely in partnership with local Workforce Investment Boards, in order to ensure that all vocational education programs effectively prepare students for quality, liveable wage jobs that are available in the regions to which they will parole.

Program assessment should include: types of employment for which programs prepare participants (including the compensation level and geographic availability of the given type of employment); qualifications of instructors; quality of curriculum; quality of equipment (as applicable); and working conditions. This review process should include all Prison Industry Authority work programs and joint ventures. **These functions should ultimately be taken over by the standing oversight body, to be conducted on an ongoing basis.**

e. Prison Work and Compensation

The material poverty of prison is one of the most degrading and demoralizing aspects of incarceration. The poverty that results from no or low wages also renders incarcerated people more susceptible to exploitation, and/or more inclined to participate in illegal activities that generate income. The fact that education and training programs typically do not provide “pay numbers” (i.e., wages or a stipend) frequently disincentivizes participation, particularly among people who have no external source of support.

Prison work is typically understood as serving one or more of the following purposes: punishment, or working off a societal debt; maintaining prison operations; providing vocational training; keeping incarcerated people occupied (to maintain order); instilling a “work ethic”; providing financial earning opportunities (to spend, save, send to loved ones/dependents, or pay restitution or other fees); or reducing costs and/or generating revenue/profit for the state, and/or for external entities.

Prioritizing quality vocational training and legitimate work experience is the best way to prepare residents for liveable wage work post-release. Creating opportunities for incarcerated people to earn money that can be spent, saved, and/or shared with dependents, promotes a sense of dignity,

strengthens family ties, and sets them up for success post release. It also reduces the economic burden of incarceration on family members, and advances the economic and public safety interests of the state as a whole.

Prison labor programs that generate revenue for the state (Prison Industry Authority) and/or for private companies (joint ventures) may at times provide useful job training or work experience; this depends on the nature of the work, the quality of instruction, and the integrity of the program's overall design and operation, among other factors. However, without intensive oversight, **production goals and profit motives create conflicts of interest that can easily undermine the integrity of program selection, design, and administration.** Political influence that commonly enables such programs can also compromise the integrity of decision-making, and divert human and material resources (including program space) from other vocational training programs that would better serve the needs of the incarcerated. For these reasons, far greater transparency and oversight of such programs will be essential.

Providing substantial wages for participation in all prison jobs, as well as academic education, vocational training, and mental health treatment programs, would dramatically increase and expand engagement, and reduce the incentive to participate in paid work programs solely for the higher pay. Creating a higher baseline wage would also positively impact the social climate of the prison (including reduced incidents of violence and other illegal activity); the well-being of family members of the incarcerated, and the strength of family ties; and the process of reentry, including long-term economic stability post-release.

Analysis and planning regarding Prison Work and Compensation should ultimately focus on:

- The current landscape of work performed by incarcerated people; the processes by which programs are created; and how hiring/assignments are carried out.
- Wages provided for different forms of work, and how these are established and funded within the CDCR budget.
- What funds are currently deducted from incarcerated people's wages (IWF, victim restitution, etc.) and how these funds are utilized or dispersed.
- Prison Industry Authority programs, including joint ventures: selection criteria, wages, deductions, working conditions, contracts, revenue.
- Potential unintended systemic impacts of revenue-generating labor (e.g., competing pressures in assignments or scheduling; disincentives for increased programming, split assignments, shorter sentences, or a reduced prison population).

SECTION III

IMPROVING CDCR POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

CDCR adult institutions, programs, and paroles are governed by the California Code of Regulations, Title 15, Division 3, Chapter 1 (Title 15); the Department Operating Manual (DOM); as well as local operating procedures (LOPs) that are established by each individual institution. Standard policy and practice (for example, regarding interpersonal conduct or what is considered contraband) are equally dictated by local institutional culture and habits. These typically reflect the attitudes and beliefs of local staff and administrators; misunderstandings or misinterpretations of Departmental policy; and/or conservative interpretations of ambiguous policy.

One of the most critical determinants of the success of San Quentin's transformation will be the thorough review and revision of key portions of Title 15, the DOM, and local operating procedures; large sections of each currently conflict with the Initiative's goals. **This analysis, and the development of recommendations for revision and implementation of changes, should include key stakeholder groups, including incarcerated people, program providers, and prison staff and administrators.**

Essential to this process will be a thoughtful communications plan that ensures that all prison staff, administrators, incarcerated people, service providers, and other key stakeholders are informed about intended changes. **The entire San Quentin community must have the opportunity to voice questions or concerns, and receive a meaningful response.** Transformation is an iterative process; once changes are implemented, they must also be continually evaluated and reinforced through ongoing communication, close supervision, and dialogue. The process will also require extensive staff training.

Initial staff skepticism about, or resistance to, changes to Departmental rules, regulations, and practices may stem from good-faith concerns about logistical matters, staffing levels, accountability, or institutional safety. **Often based on harrowing lived experience, staff are highly sensitive to changes that are rolled out without adequate analysis, planning, or communication.** Yet their input will be invaluable for devising effective strategies to implement abstract ideas on the ground. If engaged appropriately, initially resistant staff may become vital partners in ensuring the Initiative's success.

At the same time, **staff who are opposed to programs as a matter of principle commonly manifest their attitudes through the invention of rules, or their refusal to acknowledge changes to standard practices. Such disruptive behavior is often compounded by poor internal communication, lax supervision, and lack of accountability measures.** Such dynamics create tremendous stress for incarcerated people, service providers, and fellow correctional staff. They also undermine the effective operation of programs, and waste precious resources. Thus institutional leadership, including supervisors, must take responsibility for ensuring that “the message” concerning changes to policy and practice is, in every sense, delivered, received, and implemented by all staff.

Operations and Logistics

Prison operations and logistics are traditionally designed to support custody functions, rather than the operation of programs; most are designed to minimize risk, sometimes at the expense of other priorities. Rules or procedures that may have once served a legitimate function are often maintained long after their usefulness or rational basis has passed. **The widespread correctional cultural aversion to change – which at times presents as malice or even superstition – is typically rooted in concerns about violence; hostility or ostracism from colleagues; or being blamed or punished, in the event that something goes wrong.** In the highly political environment of corrections, no one is typically rewarded when things go well, but they will likely be punished harshly when things go wrong, even if they were not to blame.

One of the single greatest challenges to the smooth operation of programs is simply basic scheduling and movement, or the flow of the day. Who is assigned where; how assignments are conducted and documented; when incarcerated individuals can move from one location to another; when they can eat, exercise, shower, pick up packages, access telephones, go to school or the library; when they must be where during institutional counts, etc.

The resulting inefficiencies are compounded by the lack of communication and coordination between the institution and outside programs; cumbersome and archaic administrative systems (i.e., for clearances for people and materials); and restrictive (and often inconsistent) rules governing allowable materials. The results are frequent disruptions and delays to programs; lost productivity and resources; and negative impacts on participants, staff, and providers, including diminished morale, provider attrition, and interpersonal tension and conflict. Such challenges also tarnish the reputation of the Department, as disruptions and communication failures are often interpreted as signs of indifference, disrespect, or malice.

This Policies and Procedures work will require analysis and recommendations concerning the following:

Local operating procedures and practices

- Gate clearances for people and materials
- IP movement (e.g., showers, unlocks, phone access, meals)
- Institutional counts
- Lockdowns and program cancellation (criteria and protocols, esp. re: movement)
- Visiting (Conduct rules, scheduling procedures, and modes of connection – e.g., via phone, video, in-person, family visiting)
- Media access
- Media equipment supervision and protocols
- Institutional communication systems (between admin and staff, with IP, with external service providers)

CDCR policies and procedures

Similar to local operating procedures, CDCR-wide policies and procedures have been developed over time largely to accomplish core institutional functions, and/or in reaction to real or anticipated problems. Yet procedures are often cumbersome and inefficient, and policies in key areas often run counter to the goal of creating a more pro-social, educational, therapeutic environment. Departmental policy that should be reviewed include the following:

- Allowable materials/contraband (especially for educational purposes, e.g., print, film, etc.)
- Access to technology and library resources
- IP/ staff interactions (especially overfamiliarity)
- Staff and IP disciplinary systems

Beyond the revision of existing Departmental policy, new policies and practices will also need to be created to support the institution's successful transformation:

1. Regarding staff/IP interaction: beyond easing restrictions on human relationships, new communication and conflict resolution practices must be created to support constructive dialogue and proactively address conflict between staff, between IPs, and between staff and IP's.

2. Institution-wide staffing: new functions and approaches will require not only training but also adequate staffing. Ascertaining what new staff positions will be required to create a healthy social climate, and supporting the efficient operation of programs and services, will require time and experience. Key areas include:

- The Community Resources Manager's Office (including administrative staff)
- Warden's office (administrative staff)
- Public Information Officer's office (administrative staff; media supervision)
- New position of Community Correctional Officer
- New position of Associate Warden of Programs
- Staffing to ensure the maximal use of existing program space
- Sufficient relief coverage for staff participating in new training/related activities
- New dedicated staff to oversee implementation of the San Quentin Initiative
- Sufficient relief staff to ensure that key staff and administrator participants in the Initiative are able to dedicate sufficient time to this work

The creation of new administrative positions and other key staff roles will require administrative support, office space, data management systems, and other related resources. **Thus all recommended revisions to institutional staffing, as well as other changes to Departmental policy or procedure, will require analysis of necessary legislative action and/or funding/budgetary changes.**

Other key areas that will also require legislative action and/or additional funding, include the following (some are mentioned elsewhere in this report):

- Improving state issue provisions (i.e., basic living supplies distributed without charge)
- IP wages, including deductions such as restitution, Inmate Welfare Fund, etc.
- Food services (nutritional and taste quality standards, procurement processes, preparation) *for both incarcerated people and staff*
- Institutional capacity: i.e., the number of people who can be housed at San Quentin. Tentative recommendation is a reduction to 2700, to allow for single ceiling (cell blocks) and single bunking (H-unit)
- Feasibility study concerning the creation of an electronic card system

SECTION IV

ADVANCING STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

The recruitment, retention, and support of highly skilled and committed custody and non-custody staff will be one of the most critical factors in the success of the Initiative. Effective institutional reform will require staff who are mature, professional, well-trained, compassionate, and appropriately compensated. It will also require working conditions, supervisory practices, support systems, and crisis response protocols that promote staff mental and physical wellness, while also holding every person accountable for their conduct.

Even under the best of circumstances, working in a California correctional facility is a complex and demanding experience. To perform consistently and with integrity, staff need a safe, secure, dignified and humane working environment. They must also have the skills and resources to carry out their responsibilities, and to engage constructively in response to challenges. They must have the guidance and support of skilled, trusted supervisors and competent peers who can help navigate the challenges of their daily work, and manage the impact of especially stressful circumstances or events.

The formidable challenges of the prison working environment are compounded by the fact that many staff bring with them high rates of prior exposure to physical danger and trauma, for example, through adverse childhood experiences, or military service. Prior experience in corrections (whether their own, or that of colleagues) has also often socialized them into a defensive and adversarial view of the prison environment, and of the incarcerated community. These are all reasons why prison staff need access to quality mental health services, robust on-going training, and effective systems of interpersonal support.

For decades, CDCR training has largely conditioned staff to approach the prison as a war zone, and the incarcerated as the enemy. As traditionally conceived, the job is fundamentally to protect oneself and the public by restricting the behavior of dangerous people. This mindset is generally reinforced by the level of violence at most California prisons. **Thus changing institutional culture will require not just transforming the skills and mindset of staff, but also the level of danger experienced by them and the incarcerated population.**

Skills and mindset can be inculcated by training and supervision; safety will also require sufficient staffing levels, an effective institutional classification and placement process; as well as a healthy, dignified environment for the incarcerated community that is replete with opportunities for meaningful work, education, healing, and growth.

Several key projects that improve support to staff have already been addressed in this report, specifically in the Transforming San Quentin's Physical Infrastructure section. (See recommendations concerning: development of staff locker rooms and fitness center, refurbishment of work stations in housing units, staff rest areas, improvements to staff trailer park, and the addition of staff housing units on site). **The following sections address key non-facilities-related projects: staff training, mental health and wellness, and the disciplinary process.**

Staff training:

Staff training is a fundamental contributor to institutional culture and performance. Training is where staff acquire not only the basic skills and knowledge with which to perform their jobs, but the conceptual framework through which they imagine the prison as a whole, and their role within it.

The comprehensive overhaul of staff training should entail the following:

- Review of existing staff training academy curriculum and other ongoing Departmental trainings (e.g., OJT)
- Development of a plan for new training curriculum and delivery systems, based on research and collaboration with experts in the field
- Establishment of a collaborative partnership with one or more key external agencies (e.g., nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and/or local community college) to 1) develop the staff training curriculum, and ultimately, 2) deliver training on an ongoing basis

Staff mental health and wellness:

One of the most critical strategies for supporting staff wellbeing, resiliency, and professional development is ensuring access to trusted people in whom they can safely confide. Traditionally, peer support networks are utilized only in times of crisis. Barriers to accessing professional psychological services include lack of available clinicians, limited insurance coverage, lack of trust, concerns about confidentiality, and the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.

The result is high rates of poor mental and physical health and associated outcomes, including premature death (e.g., from heart attack, stroke, diabetes) as well as depression, anxiety, alcoholism, divorce, domestic violence, and suicide. Many custody and non-custody staff also show signs of PTSD.

Three key areas of focus are:

- Expanding the use of peer support systems
- Improving access to external professional mental health services (including negotiated insurance provisions)
- Changing correctional cultural attitudes towards mental health care

Staff discipline:

When staff fail to perform their jobs appropriately, and/or if they “act out” egregiously, the traditional presumptive response is through the staff disciplinary process. While this can provide a mechanism for “checking” staff who behave inappropriately, discipline alone is a blunt and slow instrument that provides little opportunity for constructive or preventative intervention. It is also inherently adversarial and legalistic, which makes it that much less useful as a tool to support professional development or personal growth.

At the same time, a great deal of staff performance failure – including serious misconduct such as abusive behavior towards colleagues or incarcerated people – is rooted in personal distress: family/relationship instability, mental health challenges, substance abuse, financial pressures, or other stress factors. Early warning signs typically do not meet formal standards of misconduct, but are nevertheless highly visible to colleagues and/or the incarcerated population.

Recommendations to address these issues should consider:

- Developing early alert and support systems to address signs of distress
- Designing new systems to address interpersonal tension and conflict
- Creating routine systems to diagnose and address “root causes” of unwanted staff behavior when related to specific workplace challenges

All of these measures combined will create a workplace in which staff have the freedom to respond to problems without fear of intimidation, threats, or retaliation — and have real alternatives to just getting their struggling colleagues “in trouble.” This will create a professional environment in which everyone — from line staff to senior administrators — is able to become their best professional self, and to know that they are truly contributing to an environment of growth and healing for all.

CONCLUSION

If planned and implemented properly, the transformation of San Quentin could become a blueprint for correctional facilities across California and throughout the United States. The fact that this process will take years to plan and fully implement does not detract from its promise, nor from its extraordinary historical significance.

If carried out in a rushed and superficial manner, however, this Initiative could undermine many of the great strides that San Quentin has made over the last few decades, and even set back the cause of prison reform itself. In particular, if perceived as a wasteful, extravagant, or even corrupt use of taxpayer dollars, it may eventually be used to dismiss urgently needed reforms nationally, and even as a justification for the prison's closure.

All interested parties are thus urged to work together to ensure a methodical process of analysis, planning, and oversight driven by individuals with the experience, expertise, commitment, and independence to ensure its long-term success. They should also work together to support Governor Newsom in gaining authorization from the legislature to redirect the entirety of those funds currently designated for demolition and new construction at the site of Building 38 to other needed construction and renovation projects at San Quentin, as outlined in this report. Such a course correction would allow the state of California to once again demonstrate world class leadership not only in correctional policy and practice, but in the realm of environmentally sustainable design, construction, and adaptive reuse.

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