



ASSEMBLY BILL 2257
COUNTY JAIL ACCOUNTABILITY

SUMMARY

AB 2257 will give counties the option to maintain sheriff-run jails or appoint an official other than the sheriff to operate the county jail system, if warranted by the need for improved jail operations and administration. The bill restores local choice in jail governance—a flexibility counties had prior to 1993.

Washington State allows jails to be operated by an agency separate from the sheriff. From large counties to small rural counties, many have opted for jails run independently of the sheriff. Counties in other states, including New Jersey, have made similar choices. California counties do not currently have this option under state law.

BACKGROUND

California’s county jails are in crisis. Deaths are occurring at record highs, people with mental illness are languishing, and costs are skyrocketing without improved outcomes. These issues occur under the direction of 57 elected sheriffs, who have been the sole and exclusive operators of California’s jails since 1993 (with the exception of Napa County).

Boards of supervisors are forced to write blank checks to sheriffs for the operation of jails. While boards of supervisors are required to fund the day-to-day operations of county jails—and pay massive legal settlements when things go wrong—boards of supervisors have no direct authority to improve jail operations.

While boards of supervisors have governance authority over the care and custody of youth in juvenile detention centers, children in the child welfare system, adults in mental health crisis facilities, and adults on probation, they have no policy authority over the care and custody of adults in the jail system. When left to the sheriff’s sole discretion, jail issues have persisted across many counties in California.

THIS BILL

Assembly Bill 2257 will restore the ability of counties to appoint an official other than the sheriff to operate the jail system. This bill provides county governments with greater leverage to advance needed jail policy changes aimed at saving lives and safeguarding taxpayer dollars.

The bill specifically provides a pathway for a county to create a department of corrections and rehabilitation to operate the local jail system, and specifies the qualifications for the director of such a system.

This bill does not require counties to change their jail governance structure, but rather encourages accountability and results by ensuring that county leaders have local discretion to ensure safe, effective, and responsible jail operations.

Support

- California Public Defenders Association
California Coalition for Sheriff Oversight
Consumer Attorneys of California
Fixin’ San Mateo County – Community Oversight initiative

Santa Barbara County Supervisor Laura Capps  
San Diego County Supervisor Monica Montgomery  
Steppe  
LA County Inspector General Max Huntsman (Ret.)  
Paul Parker, Law Enforcement Accountability  
Executive  
Black American Political Association of CA –  
Sacramento Chapter  
Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable  
Economy (CAUSE)  
Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice SB