



California Taxpayers

and the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act
A California Voter Initiative — November 2000

Prosecuting the “war on drugs” has cost California taxpayers dearly. The Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act would reduce the cost of the drug war by focusing on drug treatment and prevention, rather than incarceration. The measure would save state and county governments approximately \$1.5 billion over the next five years. The California Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) and the state Department of Finance project these savings from:

Prison operations and parole savings. California could reduce the number of state prison beds needed for drug offenders by between 10,000 and 12,000 within a few years of enacting this initiative. This would result in net savings to the state of between \$100 million and \$150 million annually, after factoring in the initiative’s appropriation of \$120 million per year for drug treatment and other services. (The initiative provides five years’ worth of appropriations to cover its programs.) With fewer drug offenders entering prisons, the state would gradually see a reduction of about 9,500 parolees per year, with savings in parole management costs of \$20 million annually.

County-level savings. If this initiative becomes law, far fewer drug defendants will contest their cases in court, and more will go into treatment programs instead of county jails. Savings of \$50 million annually in county expenditures will result from these changes.

Delayed or avoided prison construction. Currently, the state is expected to need to pay for construction of another new state prison by 2003. However, the LAO and Dept. of Finance project that if this initiative is approved, “the state’s prison system will grow significantly more slowly,” providing a one-time savings of between \$475 million and \$575 million in deferred or avoided prison construction costs.

**State savings
(net): \$100 to
\$150 million
annually**

**One-time
savings of \$475
to \$575 million
on prison
construction**

**County-level
savings: \$50
million annually**

**Overall savings:
\$1.5 billion over
five years**

— Analysis by California
Legislative Analyst’s Office with
Department of Finance

All research references are available upon request.