Secretary Kernan Testimony

5/10/16 Senate Veteran’s Affairs Committee

Hearing on Incarcerated Veterans

Mr. Chair and Members, thank you very much for having me. I want to thank you for taking the time to discuss the very important topic of incarcerated veterans.

During my years with CDCR, I have seen the power of concentrating programs and services for our incarcerated veterans to not only the inmate, but to the culture of the prison, and to the safety of the staff at our prisons.

We have about 6,300 incarcerated veterans in our prisons today, and another 500 more that are self-identified.

You're going to hear from staff in the following panel about the work being done in the prisons from Dr. Johnson and Lt. Da Rosa. We are doing some great work in this area. You're going to hear from staff about the programs and services both in the prison, and how we can do a better job transitioning incarcerated veterans into the community.

One of the primary themes for CDCR and the Administration is to do a better job of rehabilitation while inmates are in our prisons. I know the Chair has many years working within the system. I am proud to say that I think there are some innovative programs going on throughout the system, including those focused on incarcerated veterans - more so than in days past.

Another primary consideration for the Department is to do a better job transitioning all offenders, including incarcerated veterans, into the community.

I believe we are at a cliff within the Department with the federal population cap. As you may know, we are operating under a population cap of 137.5% of design capacity. We are currently about 2,000 inmates under that population cap. We have about 4,900 inmates out-of-state today that many would like to see brought back to the state. We have prisons that have well outlived their useful life. We have difficult challenges ahead of us. There is no doubt in my mind that if we were to go over that cap, the Federal Court and the Compliance Officer letting inmates out of prison would be bad policy for public safety.

So it is in that spirit that we try to partner with USDVA and CalVet to bridge the services to this population as a critical element of CDCR's mission. I would also like to say that one of the primary elements of the Governor's sponsored initiatives will incentivize inmates to participate in productive rehabilitative programs and prepare them for parole. I think that those services are providing hope in our Department and will help all of our incarcerated veterans as well. Inmates earning their way out and getting services to succeed is smart policy for public safety.

I look forward to this discussion, and again, thank you for your attention in this matter, and I look forward to answering any questions that you might have. Thank you.