



## A Review of the California Youth Authority's Infrastructure

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The California Youth Authority is confronted with various challenges that call for a fresh examination of its facility needs: (1) an aging infrastructure with housing-related and other deficiencies; (2) demands for special facilities, as a result of state, federal, and court mandates to deliver mental health and education services to wards; and (3) facility overcapacity as a result of a significant decline in the ward population. Given these concerns, we believe that a fundamental reassessment of the department's facilities—achieved through the development of a facilities master plan—could lead to a significant improvement in the way the department's infrastructure needs are met. ■

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## INTRODUCTION

The California Youth Authority is responsible for the protection of society from the criminal and delinquent behavior of young people. This is achieved mainly through custodial control of these individuals (referred to as “wards”), and provision of vocational, educational, health, and mental health treatment services.

The department is confronted with four challenges that call for a fresh examination of its facility needs:

- First, the average age of its institutions is over 43 years. This has caused maintenance and repair needs to increase and, at some point, many buildings will have exceeded a reasonable life expectancy and will have to be replaced.
- Second, the ward population that many of the institutions were originally designed for 40 or 50 years ago is substantially different from the population today, which has led to many facility deficiencies in the types of housing required.
- Third, the Youth Authority is faced with state, federal, and court mandates to deliver mental health and

education services to wards, which carry with them demands for special facilities.

- Finally, the ward population has decreased from a high of over 10,000 in 1996 to its current level of 4,300. A further decrease to 3,700 is projected by 2010. This decline has resulted in overcapacity and presents an opportunity to consider closure and consolidation as elements in a comprehensive review of the department’s programmatic and facility needs.

In this report, we look at the condition of the Youth Authority’s facilities and its capital outlay plans. In particular, we look at whether a comprehensive reassessment is needed before the state proceeds with any substantial amount of capital investment. It may be that a more cost-effective program can be delivered through some combination of institution closures, construction of one or more new institutions, and some level of replacement and renovation of facilities at existing institutions, rather than continuing with a less comprehensive, project-by-project approach to capital planning.

## BACKGROUND

The Youth Authority was created by law in 1941. The department is responsible for the protection of society from the criminal and delinquent behavior of young people (generally ages 12 to 25). The department operates institutions and provides parole supervision for juve-

nile and young adult offenders (referred to as wards). It is one of the largest youthful offender agencies in the nation, with around 4,300 males and females in its institutions and camps, and approximately 4,000 more wards in the community under parole supervision.

The Youth Authority receives its population primarily from juvenile court referrals. Offenders committed to the department do not receive determinate sentences. The Youth Authority Board evaluates the suitability of wards for release to parole. Those committed by the criminal courts that cannot complete their sentence by age 21 are transferred to the California Department of Corrections (CDC) prisons at age 18.

The department also supervises parolees and operates training and treatment programs that seek to educate, correct, and rehabilitate youthful offenders. The Youth Authority is responsible for providing a range of services to the ward population as mandated by existing state and federal law, and various court mandates. These services include educational, vocational, health, and mental health treatment programs.

### Existing Institutions

As of early 2003, the Youth Authority operated 11 institutions, as well as housing some wards at four conservation camps operated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDFFP). Their locations are shown in Figure 1. The discussion that follows is based on information as of March 2004.

In September 2003, the Youth Authority closed the Karl Holton Youth Correctional Drug and Alcohol Treatment Facility at Stockton. In March 2004, the Youth Authority closed the Northern California Youth Reception Center at Sacramento and the male portion of the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility at Camarillo. The part of the Ventura institution housing female wards will remain open, along with around 50 beds at the male fire camp. As a result of these closures, the Youth Authority is currently

operating nine institutions and four fire camps. These institutions, plus the CDFFP conservation camps, will leave the Youth Authority with around 6,000 beds. Because of various programmatic requirements which reduce the number of “usable” beds, this capacity would house about 5,700 wards—roughly 1,400 beds more than the current population. (The *2004-05 Governor’s Budget* also proposes the closure of Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility in Whittier and the Mt. Bullion Conservation Camp in Mariposa. As the Legislature has not yet acted on these proposals, we have included these facilities’ bed capacities in the discussion which follows.) Figure 2 (see page 6) shows how these beds are distributed among the institutions. It also shows the three types of beds at the institutions:

- **Dormitories.** About 40 percent of the beds are in dormitories. These are larger rooms housing between four and 50 wards, typically with bunk beds.
- **Dry Cells.** A single dry cell is a small room—around 60 square feet—housing a single ward. A dry cell has no sink or toilet. About 6 percent of the department’s beds are dry cells.
- **Wet Cells.** A wet cell, by comparison, has a sink and a toilet. Over half of Youth Authority beds are now wet cells.

The types of beds are important in meeting the department’s programmatic needs. As discussed below, more wards are now committed to the Youth Authority for violent offenses than was the case when most of the department’s facilities were built. Many of the beds provided when the institutions were originally opened were in dormitories, which are

Figure 1

### California Youth Authority Institutions and Camps



**Figure 2**  
**Design Capacity**  
**As of March 2004**

|   | Location    | Dorm         | Cells      |              | Total Beds               |
|---|-------------|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------|
|   |             |              | Dry        | Wet          |                          |
| <b>Institutions</b>                                   |             |              |            |              |                          |
| Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility            | Chino       | —            | —          | 1,272        | 1,272                    |
| Preston Youth Correctional Facility                   | Ione        | 510          | —          | 270          | 780                      |
| Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility            | Whittier    | 380          | 150        | 165          | 695                      |
| El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facility         | Paso Robles | 388          | 112        | 190          | 690                      |
| N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility           | Stockton    | —            | —          | 600          | 600                      |
| Dewitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility             | Stockton    | 400          | —          | 52           | 452                      |
| O.H. Close Youth Correctional Facility                | Stockton    | 266          | 99         | 35           | 400                      |
| Southern California Youth Reception Center and Clinic | Norwalk     | —            | 2          | 376          | 378                      |
| Ventura Youth Correctional Facility—female            | Camarillo   | —            | 1          | 328          | 329                      |
| Ventura Youth Correctional Facility—male <sup>a</sup> | Camarillo   | 50           | —          | —            | 50                       |
| <b>Conservation Camps</b>                             |             |              |            |              |                          |
| Ben Lomond Youth                                      | Santa Cruz  | 80           | —          | —            | 80                       |
| Mt. Bullion Youth                                     | Mariposa    | 80           | —          | —            | 80                       |
| Pine Grove Youth                                      | Pine Grove  | 80           | —          | —            | 80                       |
| Washington Ridge Youth                                | Nevada City | 80           | —          | —            | 80                       |
| <b>Totals</b>   |             | <b>2,314</b> | <b>364</b> | <b>3,288</b> | <b>5,966<sup>b</sup></b> |

<sup>a</sup> Ventura will continue to house about 50 male wards at its fire camp.

<sup>b</sup> Because of programmatic requirements, this number of beds will house around 5,700 wards. For example, a bed might be used for temporary detention of disorderly wards rather than for permanent ward housing.

not well suited for housing violent wards. Dry cells provide more secure housing, but they still have security deficiencies because they do not have a toilet and sink, and high-risk wards must be escorted to group restrooms and showers. The Youth Authority has converted many dry cells to wet and provided other security improvements, but about 40 percent of its ward population continues to be housed in dormitories.

As discussed below, the nine remaining institutions have an average age of over 40 years, which is approaching the point where buildings and infrastructure must either be replaced or require significant investment for renovation and renewal (see Figure 3). The Youth

Authority estimates, for instance, that there is almost \$70 million of deferred maintenance needs and over \$200 million in major capital outlay requirements for the system as a whole.

Some individual buildings and infrastructure improvements have been constructed at the institutions since they were first established, and there have also been renovations and modifications to buildings and infrastructure systems over the years. Overall, however, the age of the majority of the buildings and infrastructure at the institutions is reflected in the dates the institutions opened.

Each institution has its individual plant characteristics. Below, we describe the institu-

**Figure 3**  
**Age of Institution and Current Capital Needs**

(Dollars in Millions)

|  | Opened | Age | Deferred Maintenance | Major Capital Outlay | Total          |
|--|--------|-----|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility, Whittier           | 1945   | 59  | \$10.2               | \$60.1               | \$70.3         |
| Preston Youth Correctional Facility, Lone                      | 1950   | 54  | 5.3                  | 27.9                 | 33.2           |
| El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facility, Paso Robles     | 1953   | 51  | 8.6                  | 21.4                 | 30.0           |
| Southern California Youth Reception Center and Clinic, Norwalk | 1954   | 50  | 2.9                  | 5.7                  | 8.6            |
| Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility, Chino              | 1959   | 45  | 3.1                  | 51.0                 | 54.1           |
| Ventura Youth Correctional Facility, Camarillo                 | 1962   | 42  | 8.4                  | 14.7                 | 23.1           |
| O. H. Close Youth Correctional Facility, Stockton              | 1966   | 38  | 12.5                 | 4.5                  | 17.0           |
| DeWitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility, Stockton            | 1967   | 37  | 7.4                  | 17.3                 | 24.7           |
| N. A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility, Stockton         | 1991   | 13  | 8.6                  | 4.8                  | 13.4           |
| <b>Totals</b>  |        |     | <b>\$67.0</b>        | <b>\$207.4</b>       | <b>\$274.4</b> |

tions that are planned to remain open after March 2004.

***Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility.***

Most of the Nelles facilities and infrastructure date back to 1945. The department has identified a need for over \$70 million for major capital outlay and deferred maintenance at this institution. The majority of the Nelles buildings and infrastructure are considered to be in poor condition. Over half of the beds are in open dormitories, while the remainder are either dry cells (22 percent) or wet cells (24 percent). Nelles offers wards programs which include academic education, sex offender programs, and vocational training. The facility is located in an urban area (Whittier) adjacent to residential and commercial neighborhoods, and this presents perimeter security concerns.

***Preston Youth Correctional Facility.*** Preston is the Youth Authority's second oldest institution, having opened in 1950. The facility is located in a rural area (Lone) in close proximity to a CDC prison. The department has identified a need for \$33 million for major capital outlay

and deferred maintenance projects. Furthermore, the majority of Preston's infrastructure and buildings are reported to be in poor condition. Two-thirds of the beds are in open dormitories. Most facilities lack critical internal security improvements. The Preston institution offers intensive treatment and special counseling services, as well as preconservation camp programs.

***El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facility.*** Most of the beds at this relatively remote facility are in dormitories (56 percent) while the remainder consists of wet cells (28 percent) and dry cells (16 percent). The Youth Authority also operates a conservation training camp program here in partnership with the CDFFP. The department has identified a need for \$21 million for major capital outlay and almost \$9 million for deferred maintenance.

***Southern California Youth Reception Center and Clinic.*** The Southern Reception Center has relatively low identified capital outlay and deferred maintenance needs (\$9 million total). Almost all of its nearly 400 beds are single wet cells.

**Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facility.** Many of the facilities at Stark, the department's largest facility, are over 40 years old. All of the beds at Stark are single wet cells. This facility houses some of the state's most violent wards. The condition of the facilities and utilities is generally average. Planned capital outlay and deferred maintenance needs are relatively high (\$54 million total), but this is at least partially due to it being substantially larger than the other facilities. This institution has facilities to house drug programs and to manage some of the most violence-prone wards in the system.

**Ventura Youth Correctional Facility.** The majority of buildings at Ventura are 40 years old. The institution was originally established for female wards but a portion of the facility was converted to house male wards in 1970. A major capital outlay project was completed in 2001 to provide complete segregation of male and female wards. In March 2004 the male housing program was closed. The female facility has 328 wet cells. It is, and will continue to be, the only Youth Authority institution for female wards. It has facilities for delivery of educational programs and operates a fire suppression program adjacent to the institution and in conjunction with the CDFFP. This camp will continue to house male wards. The Ventura institution has an identified need for \$15 million of major capital outlay projects and \$8 million of deferred maintenance.

**O.H. Close Youth Correctional Facility.** The Close facility is the department's only institution for very young male wards. It has 400 beds—66 percent dorm (266 beds), 25 percent dry cells (99 beds), and 9 percent wet cells (35 beds). The condition of the infrastructure is considered to be average and planned capital

expenditures are lower than at most other institutions. The O.H. Close institution has an identified infrastructure need of \$17 million—\$4.5 million in major capital outlay projects and \$12.5 million in deferred maintenance.

**DeWitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility.** The Nelson facility is 37 years old. It has mostly dormitory housing (88 percent) and a small number of single wet cells (12 percent). The utility infrastructure is reported to be in poor condition, and planned capital expenditures are about average. The Nelson institution has an identified need for \$25 million for major capital outlay projects and deferred maintenance. Dewitt Nelson operates extensive job training programs and a youth conservation camp.

**N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility.** This is the department's newest facility, having opened in 1991. All of its 600 beds are wet cells housing more violent males between the ages of 18 and 25. This institution has an identified need for \$13 million of major capital outlay projects and deferred maintenance.

## The Infrastructure Plan

*California's Five-Year Infrastructure Plan* is intended to give the Legislature an understanding of the capital outlay needs of all state agencies and a specific plan for the next five years. The 2003 plan included a five-year capital development plan for the Youth Authority. Figure 4 (top portion) shows the needs the Youth Authority identified over the period, by category. As the figure shows, about three-fourths of the identified dollars are to address critical infrastructure deficiencies. The projects scheduled for funding are shown in the bottom portion of Figure 4.

**Figure 4**  
**California Youth Authority**  
**2003 Five-Year Infrastructure Plan**

(Dollars in Thousands)

| Category                                  | 2003-04         | 2004-05         | 2005-06         | 2006-07         | 2007-08         | Total            |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <b>Needs Identified by the Department</b> |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |
| Critical infrastructure deficiencies      | \$16,593        | \$85,120        | \$35,760        | \$30,010        | \$19,895        | \$187,342        |
| Facility/infrastructure modernization     | —               | 195             | 1,961           | 1,000           | 976             | 4,132            |
| Program delivery changes                  | 840             | 9,942           | 17,649          | 4,653           | 9,126           | 42,210           |
| Workload space deficiencies               | —               | —               | —               | 1,104           | 9,628           | 10,642           |
| <b>Totals</b>                             | <b>\$17,433</b> | <b>\$95,257</b> | <b>\$55,370</b> | <b>\$36,677</b> | <b>\$39,589</b> | <b>\$244,326</b> |
| <b>Projects Scheduled for Funding</b>     |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |
| Critical infrastructure deficiencies      | <b>\$2,750</b>  | <b>\$13,358</b> | <b>\$18,542</b> | <b>\$5,723</b>  | <b>\$2,750</b>  | <b>\$43,123</b>  |
| <b>Proposed Funding Sources</b>           |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |
| <i>General Fund</i>                       | \$2,750         | \$5,103         | \$18,542        | \$5,273         | \$2,750         | \$34,868         |
| <i>Lease Revenue Bonds</i>                | —               | 8,255           | —               | —               | —               | 8,255            |

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In recent years there have been three trends having significant implications for Youth Authority facilities. First, the institutions are receiving more wards committed for violent offenses. Second, there has been a decrease in the number of wards committed each year resulting in significant excess capacity. And third, new requirements for delivery of mental health and educational programs have been imposed. We discuss each of these in greater detail below.

### The Changing Ward Population

The department's older institutions were designed as reform schools for younger, more mentally stable, and less violent wards. The current ward population is characterized by the following:

- 80 percent of the ward population is over the age of 18.

- 60 percent of wards have been committed for violent offenses.
- 97 percent of wards have one or more mental health problems.

Figure 5 (see next page) shows how the mix of commitment offenses at the time of the first admission has changed over the last 40-plus years. In 1959 only about 12 percent of wards admitted for the first time were committed for violent offenses such as murder, assault, robbery, and kidnapping. The percentage of violent offenders at first admission was about 50 percent in 2001. (The overall percentage of violent offenders in the Youth Authority is even higher—about 60 percent. This is because violent offenders tend to stay in longer.) The changes in the ward profile have resulted from various policy changes that have encouraged counties to serve

more of their less serious offenders, and send juveniles with a history of more violent crimes to the Youth Authority.

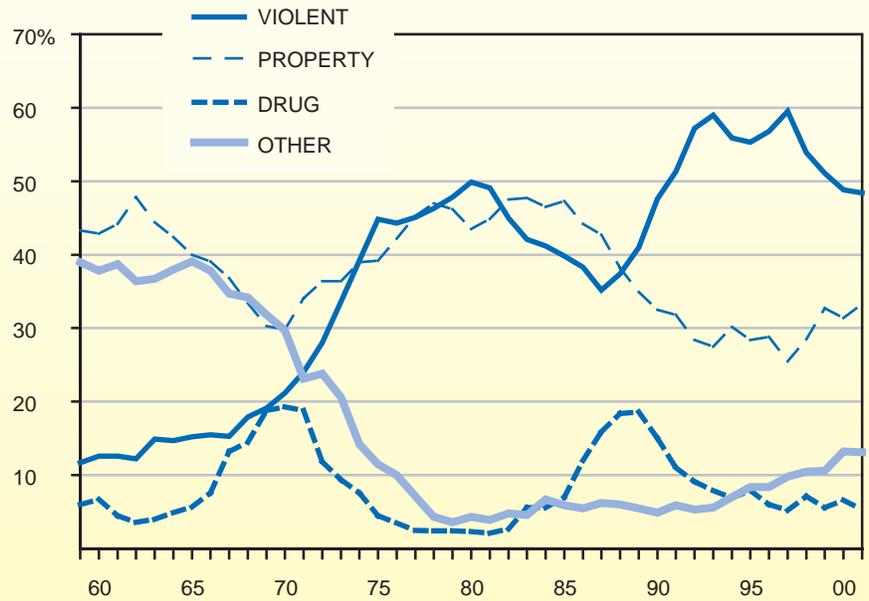
In many cases, the existing facilities are not designed to accommodate these changes in the ward population. This is evidenced by the department's plan to construct new and modify hundreds of cells to provide more secure housing for the ward population. Measures include modifications to prevent ward suicide attempts and conversion of dry cells to wet cells. Furthermore, a significant number of internal and external upgrades are planned to improve living unit and institution perimeter security to protect wards, staff, and the public surrounding the institutions.

**Declining Ward Population**

As Figure 6 shows, between 1996 and 2003, the ward population declined by half—from over 10,000 to about 5,000. This

**Figure 5**

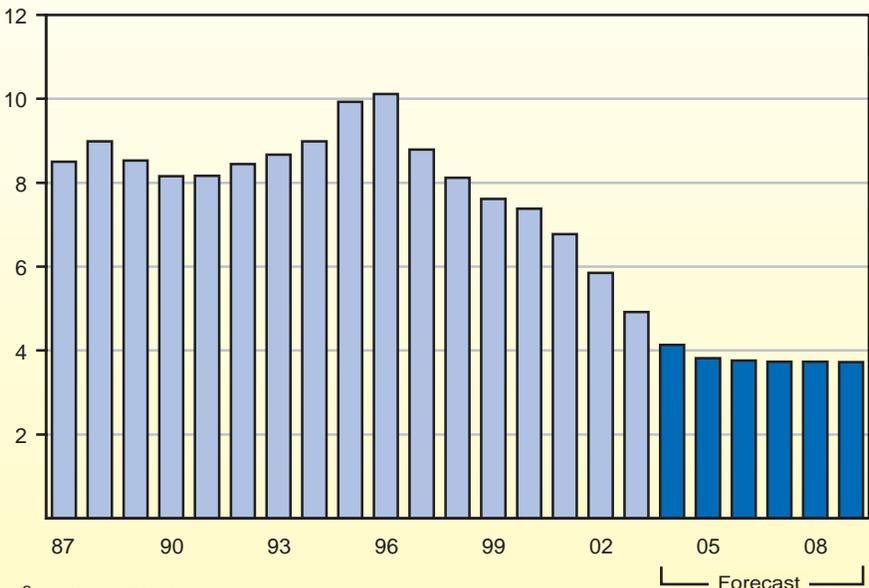
**California Youth Authority  
Commitment Offense at First Admission**



**Figure 6**

**Ward Population<sup>a</sup>**

(In Thousands)



<sup>a</sup>As of June 30 of each year.

had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the department's facility demands.

### ***Facilities for Mental Health Treatment.***

Pursuant to various court actions and in recognition of the need to provide mental health services to wards committed to the state, the Youth Authority has increased the availability of this type of treatment to wards. The department developed an implementation plan titled *Strategic Plan 2001-2004 Mental Health Services for Wards and Parolees: Creating a True Continuum of Care System* to guide the department's expansion of services. The plan calls for the creation of a multitiered service delivery program. Furthermore, an independent study of the Youth Authority's mental health program was released in 2002. This report further defined the types of services required by the ward population. The current program consists of graduated and focused levels of health and mental health care, including varying levels of inpatient, outpatient, and residential counseling and treatment services—including health, mental health, and substance abuse programs. The Youth Authority has indicated it plans to either

construct new or renovate existing space for 400 beds to house wards in need of mental health treatment.

***Facilities for Education Programs.*** Under current law, the Youth Authority is required to provide education services to wards. The Youth Authority adopted a policy in 1998 requiring each ward to obtain a high school diploma as a condition of parole and; in 1999, a law was enacted requiring the department to provide an education course of study for all wards not having a high school diploma. These high school requirements have created a substantial need for additional and upgraded education facilities. A significant amount of the educational program at various institutions is delivered in temporary buildings. These temporary buildings inherently have a rather limited useful life, and have functional deficiencies such as inadequate security and ineffective air conditioning at institutions located in warm climates. The location of some of these temporary buildings is also an issue because they are often located a distance from housing units, requiring intensive staff supervision of ward movements.

## **CURRENT PROBLEMS**

The recent developments described above have resulted in the Youth Authority having excess capacity and facilities that are functionally and physically obsolete. These problems are discussed below.

### **Excess Capacity**

As shown in Figure 6, the Youth Authority population is currently around 4,300 and is projected to decline to about 3,700 by the end

of the decade. As described earlier, the department currently has a capacity of about 5,700 beds. This means that the Youth Authority may have excess capacity of about 1,400 beds—25 percent of the total. This situation has been recognized by the Legislature as the department was directed to prepare a plan for consolidation of institutions in order to provide a more cost-effective program.

**Issues Potentially Affecting Level of Excess Capacity.** The budget contains a number of proposals which could have an impact on the level of excess capacity. For example, it proposes legislation to (1) change the age jurisdiction of the Youth Authority from 25 years of age to 22 years of age and (2) reform sentencing policies that would allow certain wards to be transferred to the adult prison system. The details of these policy proposals have not been provided to the Legislature and the budget assumes no budget-year impact. However, these changes would have the effect of decreasing the ward population, resulting in even greater excess capacity. The budget also proposes to reduce funding for local probation services, which could have the opposite effect of increasing the ward population. As we discuss in our *Analysis of the 2004-05 Budget Bill*, none of these proposals would likely have a significant effect on the ward population in the short term, but should be considered in making budgetary decisions affecting the state's long-term interests, such as whether to close additional youth correctional facilities. In our *2004-05 Budget; Perspectives and Issues* (please see page 93), we recommend, as an alternative to the Governor's juvenile justice proposal, that the Legislature consider a reform proposal that would (1) shift responsibility for the relatively small population of youthful offenders in the Youth Authority back to the counties and (2) change the role of the state to that of a "service provider" from whom the counties would buy services. If adopted, this type of proposal would likely significantly decrease the current ward population served by the Youth Authority.

## **Functional Obsolescence**

While the declining ward population has reduced the overall need for institutions and facilities, the changed nature of the current ward population and mandates to provide mental health and educational programs have resulted in the department having facilities that are in many ways functionally obsolete. These deficiencies extend from the basic configuration of institutions and buildings to specific features and systems (such as housing units and internal and perimeter security).

### ***Building Configurations and Features.***

When the large majority of Youth Authority buildings were designed and constructed, there was significantly less need for many security features. The basic configuration of many buildings reflects the Youth Authority's heritage as reform schools rather than correctional facilities. For instance, the reform school dormitory layout is not secure or efficient for programming and housing a significant portion of the existing population.

The high percentage of more violent wards requires more secure facilities, which incorporate the appropriate space for program delivery. In most cases, this can only be achieved through costly retrofits of existing facilities or construction of new types of correctional institutions. Higher-security buildings have a fundamentally different configuration that allows custodial staff to monitor wards more closely. With a correctional institution layout, staff can observe virtually every cell from a central control point. Furthermore, these facilities often have specialized program space integrated into the buildings.

Many of the features needed in buildings that house a violent population are very differ-

ent in correctional buildings—such as secure doors, windows, finishes, alarm systems, lighting and electrical fixtures. Some of these features can be upgraded by renovation of existing buildings—but others cannot because of prohibitive costs and structural and infrastructure impediments in the older buildings.

**Ward Housing.** In some cases at existing institutions, the Youth Authority has taken steps to accommodate the behavioral issues associated with today’s wards. For instance, existing celled housing has been retrofitted with steel plating on the walls and ceiling, and food pass-through slots have been installed in cell doors. Other modifications include replacement of windows and installation of secure ceiling lights and video cameras for ward monitoring. Steel framed bunks have been replaced with concrete beds.

**Internal Security Systems.** Similar to the perimeter security improvements required with a more violent population, security improvements to the interior and exterior of the institutions are needed. These can involve lighting; sallyports; cameras; alarms and systems to operate doors, gates, and other features remotely; and construction of monitoring stations for correctional officers. Some of these features can be retrofitted into existing buildings and grounds but it may be costly, difficult, or impractical to do so in some cases.

### **Physical Obsolescence**

In addition to the facilities that are functionally obsolete, the department’s facilities are in many instances approaching the end of their useful asset lives.

**Age of Facilities.** The average age of the Youth Authority’s institutions is over 40 years and most of the buildings and infrastructure elements are of that same age. This is an age when many building and infrastructure elements require significant and often expensive replacement or modernization. When this point is reached, it is legitimate to ask in many cases if it is wise to spend money renovating and upgrading buildings or if new construction would be more cost-effective. If a building is functionally and physically obsolete, spending money on renovations may not be the best decision. The same question can be asked about the entire institution. If the location and configuration of an institution is such that it cannot effectively manage and provide programs for today’s ward population, it may be appropriate to consider closure and development of a replacement institution.

**Temporary Buildings.** A significant number of buildings at some institutions are of a “temporary” type of construction. These have a significantly shorter useful life expectancy (about 20 years, compared to about 40 years for buildings having a permanent type of construction). In many cases, it is impractical to renovate them to accommodate new or special needs. Temporary buildings are being used at some institutions to house educational and other program functions. These facilities are often used as an interim solution to the problem of finding space for new programs. Frequently, these facilities are expected to perform at the same level as other fixed assets.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

There is recognition in the department, administration, and the Legislature that the Youth Authority faces a significant challenge with its institutions. One recent, significant step has been the department's response to legislative direction to develop options for institution closures.

### **Institution Consolidation**

In response to the ward population decline, Chapter 1124, Statutes of 2002 (AB 3000, Oropeza) was enacted. This legislation requires the department to submit a written plan to close at least one institution by June 2004 and a total of at least three by June 2007. In November 2002, the Youth Authority submitted its report recommending the closure of three institutions, which would reduce the number of beds from around 7,000 to about 6,000 (a 20 percent reduction).

**Consolidation Efforts to Date.** Due to the state's fiscal condition, the timeline for institution closures was accelerated. The department has already closed three institutions: the Northern Youth Correctional Center, the Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility, and the male portion of the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility. In addition, the *2004-05 Governor's Budget* proposes to close the Fred C. Nelles facility and the Mount Bullion Conservation Camp in the budget year.

**LAO Comments on Actions to Date.** We believe the department's closure actions to date are reasonable. They result in the closure of older institutions (Nelles and the Northern Reception Center) and one with a high backlog of deferred maintenance and needed major capital outlay (Karl Holton).

### **What More Can the Legislature Do?**

While the consolidation efforts have been a good first step, they only partially address one of the problems we have identified—excess capacity. The Legislature will not only have to deal with additional closure/consolidation proposals in the future, but also with the physical and/or functional obsolescence of a majority of the department's remaining assets.

Given these concerns, we believe that this is an opportune time for a fundamental reassessment of the Youth Authority's facilities. The goal of such a reassessment would be to provide the state with a forward-looking plan on the physical assets needed for the Youth Authority to:

- Meet its educational, mental health, and other programmatic goals.
- Provide a safe environment for both wards and Youth Authority employees.
- Minimize operating costs to the extent possible.

The main output of this reassessment would be a facilities master plan to guide future spending on Youth Authority facilities. It would address such key issues as:

- **Number of Institutions Needed.** The state could accommodate a projected ward population of less than 4,000 with fewer institutions. For instance, it has been suggested that the male population could be accommodated at two large facilities—one in Northern California and one in Southern California. If true, there would be potentially major savings from reduced overhead expenses and pos-

sible revenue from the sale of surplus property.

- **Use of Existing Institutions.** As we have noted, many of the department’s facilities are in poor condition. It is important to know which ones have such a limited useful life remaining that they are not worth any significant additional capital investment.
- **Potential New Facilities.** It may be that—on a life-cycle basis—some new facilities could provide less expensive alternatives to renovating the Youth Authority’s existing facilities. The reassessment could evaluate such options.

To perform such a reassessment and develop a master facilities plan would require additional resources. Given the state’s fiscal situation, we appreciate the difficulty in augmenting budgets. If, however, the Legislature concurs that a reassessment would be of value, potential sources of money could be identified to initiate the planning process. (These might include existing “budget package” funds provided in the annual budget act, or any remaining bond fund balances.)

While the Youth Authority will need outside help to perform a facilities reassessment and develop a master plan, there is much additional information that the department will need to assemble. For instance:

- The department has been developing facility standards, which define the types and amounts of space necessary for delivery of ward programs. (These standards, however, have not yet been released to the Legislature.) These standards are the basic “building blocks” for determining facility needs.
- The department will also need to have a complete inventory of its physical assets, including existing levels of deferred maintenance.
- Finally, the Youth Authority will need to explore all possible options for addressing its facilities needs. For instance, some of the Youth Authority’s facility issues might be addressed through joint facility arrangements similar to those developed for conservation camps with the CDFFP. The California Conservation Corps, for example, has some programs and facility needs that may be compatible with those of the Youth Authority.

The development of a master plan could lead to a significant improvement in the way the department’s capital needs are met. It also could serve as a foundation for proposals in future state infrastructure plans prepared by the administration.

## CONCLUSION

Some of the significant developments affecting the department's facilities are of recent origin—such as mental health and high school mandates. Others developed slowly over the decades—such as the increasing percentage of the ward population committed for violent offenses and the population decline. Cumulatively, these developments have made it increasingly difficult for the department to perform its mission with its current array of facilities. As a

result, we recommend that the state undertake a fundamental reassessment of the Youth Authority's physical plant and provide a forward-looking facilities master plan. This reassessment should take account of any adopted policy reforms resulting from enactment of the 2004-05 budget. We believe that a relatively small commitment of time and resources to such an effort in the coming year or two would be a wise investment for the future.