

latimes.com

California lawmakers act to repeal early-release law

The state Senate voted unanimously to roll back the program after lawmakers expressed concerns about its possible effect on public safety. The legislation now moves to the Assembly.

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

April 30, 2010

Reporting from Sacramento

State lawmakers moved Thursday to repeal much of a new program that allows the early release of county jail inmates.

The state Senate voted unanimously to roll back the program after lawmakers expressed concerns about its possible effect on public safety. They cited news reports of a Sacramento man who was arrested on suspicion of attempted rape within hours of his early release.

The provision for county inmates was one of many sweeping changes that lawmakers approved last year to save money and address overcrowding. It was put in place as California, under pressure from federal courts to reduce its prison population, began sending to county jails and local reentry programs thousands of offenders who would normally go to state prisons.

That created new overcrowding concerns for counties, so the Legislature passed a law allowing counties to increase early release for many inmates. It allows inmates to earn enough good-behavior credits to have their sentence reduced by half. Previously, credits earned could reduce sentences by a third.

On Thursday, the Senate voted to go back to the old system. The measure it passed, SB 1487, was supported by the California State Sheriffs Assn. and the Chief Probation Officers of California.

"Common sense needs to prevail," said state Sen. Tom Harman (R-Huntington Beach), who opposed the early-release plan when it was approved last year. "Never should we jeopardize our public safety requirements as legislators simply to balance our budget."

Democrats also supported the measure, saying that the system had not worked as planned.

The legislation next goes to the Assembly, which is expected to pass it.

Lawmakers have not moved on any alternative plans for easing county jail overcrowding that could recur if SB 1487 becomes law.