

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY RODERICK Q. HICKMAN

CHAIRMAN WALTON: Secretary Hickman, we're happy to have you here with us. I've heard some good things about you, and we're honored to have you with us. So if you could just give us your perspective on the problem and what you think we need to do to attack it.

SECRETARY HICKMAN: Good morning, Commissioners and esteemed guests.

I want to begin by thanking all of you for this opportunity to speak today about a topic that clearly underscores this great nation's commitment to making collaborative intervention in the effort to reduce crime, violence and victimization of vulnerable populations, such as the youth, female offenders, mentally ill, gay, transgender, and the less sophisticated offenders in our system.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation staunchly supports the Prison Rape Elimination Act. We recognize the need for swift action. And I've made a commitment to a strategic planning process for complying with PREA. Not just because it's the law, but because we have made a commitment to safe prisons and to treating inmates humanely. Our support and fervor is evidenced and endorsed not only by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or CDCR, but also by our Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in our Department

of Corrections Strategic Plan, our plan to reorganize the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and recognize the differing challenges posed by men and women, adults and juveniles.

This reorganization will ultimately bring about prison reform that is unprecedented in the history of the California Correctional System. We want to share our vision with you. It is a vision that sets the foundation and tone for achieving compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act. While underscoring our commitment to changing prison cultures and the lives of our offenders, our vision is this: We will end the cause and tragic effects of crime, violence and victimization in our communities through a collaborative effort that provides intervention to at-risk populations, quality services from the time of arrest and successful integration back into society.

Offender and staff safety is paramount to the new mission of rehabilitation. We've identified the provision of safe living and working environments as an overarching strategy within our reorganization. Compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act is specifically identified as a milestone of our success. This reform will challenge the very fabric of our culture, lighting the path to achieve our vision of safe prisons.

In line with the Prison Rape Elimination

Act, we cannot lose sight of the overall complexities of managing prisons in this country. And my just -- today is Thursday. And the week that I've been at work in Sacramento, I've had to deal with terrorists coming from possible cells in prisons. I've had a riot where over 20 staff members were injured and one inmate was killed in a homicide. And I've had to deal with the federal court in looking at oversight in regards to the provision of medical services in California.

And we still are very aggressive in implementing PREA. And I think it's imperative that we look at this as a vehicle to changing prisons in this country, that we broadly look at this to help us look at the entire process.

As a first step in PREA, we obtained a \$500,000 federal grant in December of 2004, as the Senator referred to. We are utilizing these resources in the department with educational resources -- researchers and experts in the field to effectively comply with the PREA requirements. We also welcome the Bureau of Justice Statistics and other federal partners to California and are committed to assessing the prevalence of sexual assault within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Understanding the problem is the only way we can arrive at a workable solution.

The CDCR has contracted with an outside

consultant from UC Irvine to conduct research and develop evidence-based information that is recorded and used in our decision-making to implement the changes designed to eliminate prison rape. We have also reached across the nation for national experts to identify what works in the area of prevention, training and response to prison rape.

The CDCR has established a PREA Committee that consists of executive-level staff, consultants, subject-matter experts in mental health, crisis intervention, medical, counseling, advocacy, custody and our very important community stakeholders. This committee has moved forward in development of a plan that will be implemented in 90 days to initially comply with the PREA Act.

The CDCR PREA Committee is in the process of utilizing national best practices to write our detailed guidelines for medical and mental-health intervention, crime-scene preservation, evidence processing, District Attorney referral guidelines and investigation protocols. Our plan is to educate staff and inmates to provide us with the ability to recognize sexual abuse, sexual protection or rape and overall intimidation. This knowledge will provide the support necessary to end sexual violence within our prison walls, ultimately creating a safer environment for both staff and inmates.

In closing, I want to thank you all for

taking the courageous steps in the passage and implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act. The impact made by your efforts will forever change the culture of our prisons. Our prisons will be safer, and the victimization of vulnerable populations will not be ignored. I believe that this will lead to a greater public safety, to changed attitudes and behavior, and successful integration back into society when people return to the communities that they came from.

Thank you. And I'm open for questions.