



FOR RELEASE:
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State Prison Population of Drug Users Dropped 20% in 1 Year After Prop. 36

- *Number of Violent Criminals Behind Bars Increased from 2000-2001*
 - *Overall Decline in Prison Population Only Possible with Prop. 36*

LOS ANGELES, May 1 — California's groundbreaking new drug-treatment law, enacted by voters as **Proposition 36** in Nov. 2000, has quickly reduced the overall state prison population, while thousands more serious and violent criminals have been locked up.

Dave Fratello, political director of the Campaign for New Drug Policies, said, "California voters are getting what they asked for with Prop. 36. We are freeing up prison cells and using them for more dangerous criminals."

Fratello continued, "Drug users are now getting treatment to help break the cycle of addiction and crime. And in the next few years, California is going to save hundreds of millions of dollars after revolutionizing its drug policies."

Nearly 4,000 fewer people were serving time in state prison for drug possession one year after passage, according to new California Department of Corrections (CDC) data highlighted today by the sponsors of the drug-treatment ballot measure. The number of prisoners whose greatest offense was drug possession fell from 19,736 to 15,781 between Dec. 31, 2000, and year-end 2001, a difference of 3,955.

In this period, the overall California prison population declined from 160,124 to 157,096, a total of 3,028. But without the drop in drug possession prisoners, the state prison population would have increased by almost 1,000 in the same period. Meanwhile, the number of people incarcerated for "crimes against persons" – including murder, rape and robbery – *increased* by 3,015. At the end of 2001, California's prison population was at its lowest total since year-end 1997.

Fratello said, "We have reversed a trend that made Prop. 36 necessary. In the dozen years before Prop. 36, we quadrupled the number of people in prison for

simple drug possession, giving our state the highest per capita incarceration rate for drug use. Voters saw it wasn't working and said, 'enough.'"

In 1988, California held 5,140 people in its state prisons whose greatest charge was simple drug possession. By the end of 1999, the figure had risen to 19,753, a dramatic increase cited often by supporters during the Prop. 36 campaign.

Prop. 36 requires drug treatment instead of jail time for a first or second offense of possessing illegal drugs. Defendants are not eligible if caught dealing drugs, if they have a violent history, or if they commit crimes in addition to drug possession. Though the law does not apply to those already in prison, it is preventing newly convicted defendants from entering prison.

Fratello said, "While we have already seen a major reduction in drug-possession prisoners, this trend is going to accelerate. With drug possession sentences ranging from one to three years, it won't be long before the number of people being released completely overwhelms the few hundred who will continue to be sent to prison because they are not eligible for treatment under Prop. 36."

FISCAL SAVINGS PROJECTED

The promise of financial savings was another argument for the ballot initiative. As Prop. 36 was heading for the ballot in 2000, the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) estimated that the overall effect of the measure would be considerable net savings to the state. LAO projected \$200 million to \$250 million per year in reduced state prison operating costs "within several years after implementation." In addition, LAO projected that by slowing the growth of the prison population, Prop. 36 would delay or make unnecessary the construction of a new prison, with capital savings of between \$450 million and \$550 million.

NEW CAMPAIGNS IN OHIO, MICHIGAN

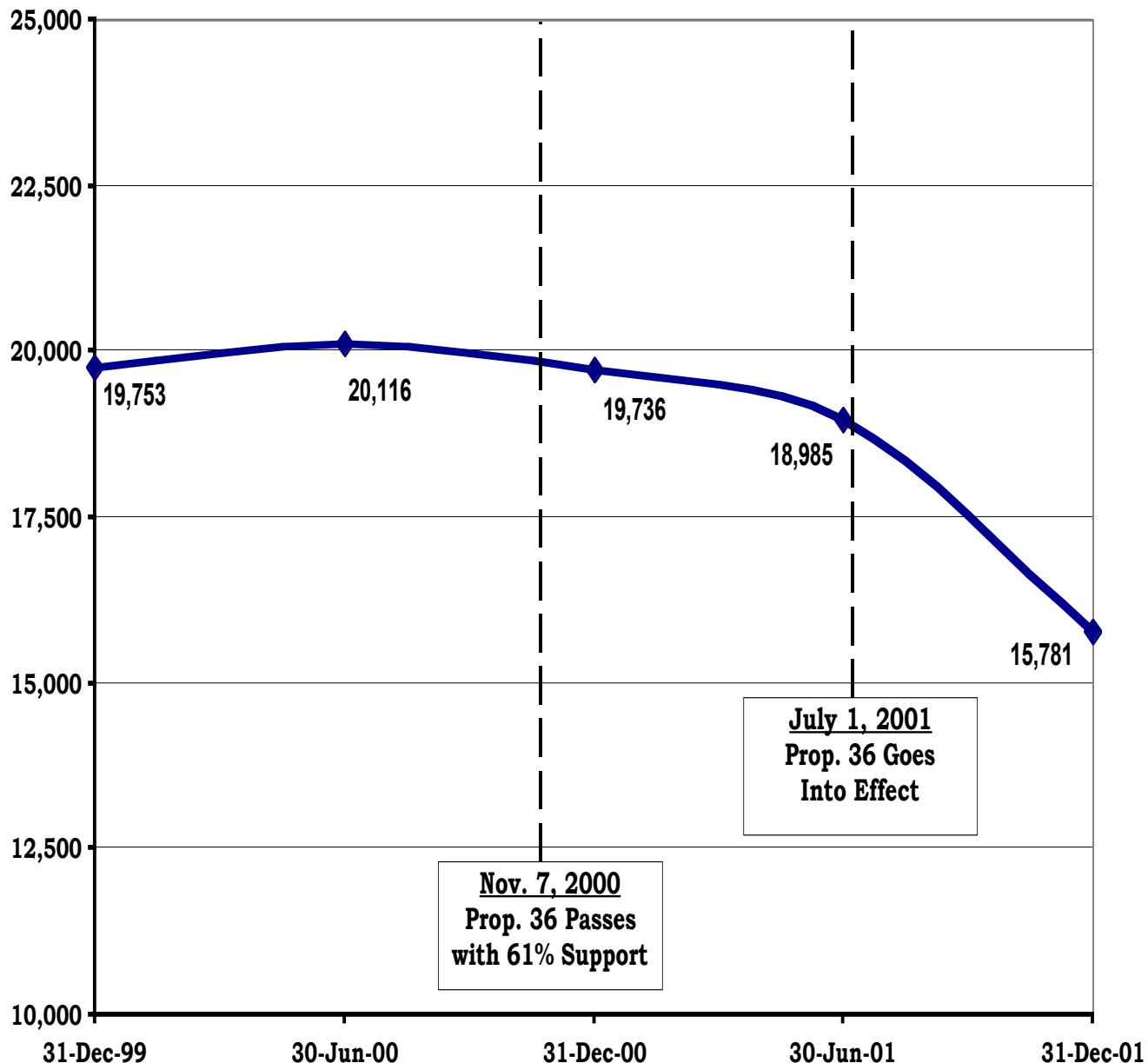
Prop. 36 was passed with 61 percent of the vote in Nov. 2000. The new data from California are expected to provide a boost to campaigns now under way in **Ohio** and **Michigan** to replicate Prop. 36. Both states are expected to vote on ballot measures modeled on the California law this November. A similar campaign begun in Florida last year has been postponed until 2004.

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For more information, please see:

<http://www.drugreform.org>

Drug Possession Offenders in California Prisons (1999-2001)



Source Data: California Department of Corrections, "Characteristics of Population in California State Prisons by Institution," December 31, 1999 through December 31, 2001.
Graph by: Scott Ehlers, Director of Research

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