

# Cox blasts state prison proposal

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

LANSING — Attorney General Mike Cox and other law enforcement officials Monday blasted a proposal by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm's administration to change Michigan's sentencing laws so fewer criminals are locked in state prison and county jails.

Cox, a Republican, called the plan seriously flawed and "mythic," arguing it would threaten the safety of the public and police officers.

He was joined at a news conference by sheriffs, police chiefs and others.

Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard didn't join the conference but also gives low marks to the governor's plan.

"We think that it's going to

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into misdemeanors.

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be extremely detrimental to our population count on a number of levels," Bouchard said.

The plan would affect future criminals by making 140 felonies into misdemeanors, reducing penalties for 58 other felonies, reclassifying the time served for drug and property crimes and putting lower-level offenders behind bars for less time.

Turning felonies into misdemeanors means people convicted of crimes are more likely to wind up in county jails, Bouchard said.

"Most misdemeanors wind up in county jails," he said. "While it frees up beds in state facilities, it has the opposite effect in county facilities."

Bouchard said overcrowding emergencies are already occurring in Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Ingham counties.

Russ Marlan, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Corrections, which developed the plan, responded that Michigan has the Midwest's highest per-capita prison incarceration rate and spends more on prisons than on universities.

By saving prison costs, Marlan said, the state can spend more on drug treatment and other programs to reduce recidivism.

Under the proposal, the prison system would house 3,300 fewer

inmates over three years. Space in crowded county jails would drop by 2,000 beds in a year, according to the Corrections Department. Bouchard disputes any drop in county jail populations from the plan.

Corrections officials say the way to cut or slow prison spending is closing prisons. State government spends \$31,000 a year housing one prisoner.

Republican lawmakers, however, say Granholm should focus on lowering recidivism and reducing the per-prisoner cost of incarceration, including taking a look at what prison guards are paid.

Oakland Press staff writer Charles Crumm and The Associated Press contributed to this report.