

California ends private prisons and immigrant detention facilities



San Francisco, October 13 (RHC)-- The U.S. state of California has banned private corporations from running prisons or immigration detention facilities, which have been described as inhumane conditions where several inmates have died in recent years.

California Governor Gavin Newsom signed legislation that will end privately outsourced incarceration by America's largest state prison system. The bill was passed by the state's legislature last month.

Newsom, who has repeatedly sparred with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump over immigration, branded private prisons as an outrage when he took office in January. "During my inaugural address, I vowed to end private prisons, because they contribute to over-incarceration, including those that incarcerate California inmates and those that detain immigrants and asylum seekers," Newsom said after signing the bill. "These for-profit prisons do not reflect our values," he added.

Rights advocates have complained about the inhumane conditions at many of the private facilities where several inmates have died in recent years.

Mario, a 31-year-old Mexican immigrant who spoke at the news conference, said he had spent six months at one of these for-profit detention centers and had "experienced first-hand the injustice, the lack of medical care, the lack of nutritious food, the lack of everything." "This is completely unacceptable," he

said. "People's lives are at stake and people's lives have been lost because of this."

There are currently about 120,000 inmates being held at California prisons, and approximately 1,700 of them are incarcerated in private facilities. There are also four immigration detention facilities in the state, with an inmate population of about 3,700.

Bryan Cox, acting press secretary for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), told local media that the new bill signed Friday would not deter immigration enforcement by the Trump administration. "The greatest impact would be felt by California residents, who would be forced to travel longer distances to visit friends and family in detention," he told local media.

Experts say private prisons, driven to maximize shareholder profits, lack proper oversight or incentives to rehabilitate inmates, and have contributed to a culture of mass incarceration by making it cheaper to imprison people.

They cite a study in 2016 that found private prisons spend less on personnel, and are less safe, than public institutions. "This is a total and complete failure, and it's hurting and abusing Californians," said state Assemblyman Rob Bonta, a chief author of the bill.

Texas, which became the first state to outsource incarceration to private companies in 1985, had far more inmates than any other state in for-profit facilities in 2017, nearly 13,000, or 7.8 percent of its total, according to the Sentencing Project, a criminal justice reform group.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with over 2.2 million people behind bars. While the country represents about 4.3 percent of the world's population, it houses around 22 percent of the world's prisoners.

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