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## California Settles Lawsuit on Juvenile Prisons

By DEAN E. MURPHY

**S**TOCKTON, Calif., Nov. 16 - The problem-ridden youth correctional system in California will focus more on rehabilitation and less on punishment under a legal settlement announced here on Tuesday by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Speaking at a correctional center where guards were videotaped in January beating prisoners, Mr. Schwarzenegger said the state needed to admit its mistakes in running the California Youth Authority and begin correcting them.

"California is wrong," Mr. Schwarzenegger said. "We make mistakes and therefore we should settle it."

He said the settlement, which stemmed from a lawsuit filed two years ago by the mother of an inmate, was a "first step" in dealing with the system's chronic problems, which have included violence against wards, poorly trained employees and inadequate treatment programs. About 3,600 offenders between the ages of 11 and 25 are housed in the state's youth institutions and camps.

"We will continue until we repair a system that has been broken for many years," Mr. Schwarzenegger said at a news conference in the visitors' room at the N. A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility on the outskirts of Stockton.

Earlier this year, a panel of experts hired by the State Legislature issued a series of scathing reports about the decline of the system, which in the 1970's was considered a model for other states. One report said the number of assaults, both among inmates and against staff members, was "unprecedented in juvenile corrections across the nation."

The experts criticized one common practice, since discontinued, of locking offenders in cages, and concluded that the condition of the vast majority of inmates with mental health needs worsened while in detention. The reports highlighted insufficient staffing at many facilities. The ratio of staff members to wards in California is about 25 to 1, state officials said, compared with 8 to 1 in many states.

Walter Allen III, the director of the California Youth Authority, joined Mr. Schwarzenegger here on Tuesday, as did representatives of the Prison Law Office, a prisoners' advocacy group that backed the lawsuit. Mr. Allen, a Schwarzenegger appointee, said the lawsuit had compelled his department "to take a hard look" at its

operations.

"What was being done was not working," Mr. Allen said.

Richard B. Ulmer Jr., a lawyer for the plaintiff, Margaret Farrell, said the candid admissions by Mr. Schwarzenegger and Mr. Allen came in stark contrast to the approach of officials in the administration of Gov. Gray Davis, who was removed from office last fall in a recall election.

Mr. Ulmer said the Davis administration fought the lawsuit "tooth and nail" and was in "complete denial" about the problems it raised. He said the Legislature's hiring of outside experts and Mr. Schwarzenegger's election combined to break what seemed like an unending impasse.

"The change in the state's attitude was almost instantaneous," he said.

Donald Specter, director of the Prison Law Office, described the state's about-face as "civic government at its best" and said Mr. Schwarzenegger's appearance at the Stockton institution was a strong indication of the state's commitment to addressing the problems raised in the lawsuit. A spokeswoman for Mr. Schwarzenegger, who toured the facility after the news conference, said he was the first California governor to visit a youth authority institution.

At the news conference, Mr. Schwarzenegger said that when he took office last November he asked to see the many lawsuits pending against the state. When he reviewed the one filed by Ms. Farrell, he said, it was obvious to him that the youth authority needed fixing.

"This is not just dialogue," he said of the settlement. "This will be action, because I am the action governor."

The settlement, written as a 22-page consent decree, will not become official until it is signed by Judge Ronald M. Sabraw, of Superior Court in Alameda County, where the lawsuit was filed. A hearing is scheduled on Nov. 29.

Among its many provisions, the consent decree calls for the appointment of a special master to oversee the changes. The master will work with experts and state officials to develop corrective plans in six major areas.