

# Reverse Course:' State Sen. Nancy Skinner Weighs in on Richmond Jail Expansion

By [Gillian Edevane](#)



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State Sen. Nancy Skinner sent a letter to the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on Friday urging its members to reverse their support for a controversial Richmond jail expansion.

The Board of Supervisors voted to approve the expansion plan in [February](#), with Supervisor John Gioia lending the lone "no" vote. The project will cost \$95 million, with \$70 million coming from a yet-to-be approved state grant and \$25 million from the county's general fund. It will also cost the county an additional \$5 million per year to maintain.

"If the state awards the grant for this project, the county can reverse course by not appropriating general fund dollars, and not

accepting the grant award," Skinner wrote in her letter. "I urge the board to take this course of action."

The expansion plan proposes adding close to 120,000 square feet to the Richmond jail, including space for 400 beds and child visitation, re-entry and rehabilitation centers. If funding is granted, the Richmond facility will be able to house high-risk inmates currently incarcerated at the severely overcrowded Martinez jail, which operates at double capacity on a daily basis.

Sheriff David Livingston has argued that the plan will not increase the net number of beds, and will instead just reduce crowding in Martinez.

Critics counter that overcrowding could be reduced in other ways, such as releasing nonviolent offenders or severing the county's contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. That lucrative deal, in which the county rents out 200 beds to ICE for the detention of immigrants, has been the subject of several protests, including one scheduled for Saturday.

"We are at a point in California's history of rethinking past criminal justice policies that too quickly resorted to incarceration with little to no focus on crime prevention, community impact, or rehabilitation," Skinner wrote.

The Board of State and Community Corrections has the final say over the \$70 million grant, a decision that will likely be announced in June. El Cerrito and Richmond have already sent in opposition memos to the board.