OPPOSE PROPOSITION 47

Prop 47’s title “Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act” is misleading and is a collection of poor changes that will produce the opposite of what that title portends.

Potentially letting up to 10,000 felons out of prison and decreasing penalties for crimes like gun theft, possession of date rape drugs, and identity theft is not a good thing for Riverside County. None of this will make our neighborhoods or schools safer. Additionally, Riverside County has more than 800 inmates currently in our county jail system for felonies that would potentially have their crimes reduced to misdemeanors under Prop 47. Under Prop 47 these very inmates would most likely not be in custody and potentially committing crimes in our communities.

We can all agree that at some level, criminals must face meaningful consequences for violating the law. Prop 47 turns that idea on its head. The penalties for serious crimes will be reduced and felons already in prison for their transgressions will be entitled to resentencing to already county jails, or outright release. Many of these inmates will petition our local courts to be resentenced under these newly proposed guidelines which will result in inmates being transferred into our local facilities for hearings, further impacting our already severely overcrowded system. This additional jail population will result in even further forced releases from custody which means more criminals on our streets.

Existing law recognizes the severity of stealing a gun. Prop 47, however, would turn gun theft into a misdemeanor. Stealing firearms makes our communities less safe, and the “Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act” decreases the penalty for that crime to a mere “slap on the wrist”. By converting felonies to misdemeanors, criminals who would otherwise be prohibited from possessing a firearm would be allowed to own guns. Misdemeanors generally do not carry the same gun ownership restrictions that felonies do, so the passage of Prop 47 will lead to the increased arming of convicted criminals.

Prop 47 also severely decreases the penalty for drug possession. Keep in mind we are not talking about possession of marijuana (which, under existing law, is punishable only as an infraction and carries no jail time whatsoever), but rather hardcore drugs like cocaine, heroin, and GHB (a drug often used to perpetrate date rape) will only be liable for a misdemeanor under Prop 47.

Prop 47 declares open season on retail businesses as well, by reducing the penalty for commercial burglary to a straight misdemeanor. In this time of increased technology and near-constant data breaches, we should not be putting out the welcome mat for those criminals who would cheat, scam, and steal.

Riverside County has a rich agricultural history with a strong economy and Prop 47 invites theft targeting our farmers and ranchers. This misguided measure reduces the available sanction for the theft of crops, livestock, and other agricultural crime.
As you can see, there are myriad of sound reasons to oppose Prop 47, and they are bolstered by the likelihood that the supposed financial savings trumpeted by the supporters will not materialize. What we know for certain, however, is that, as thousands of felons leave the state prisons, this measure will create even more pressure on our already overcrowded jail system, causing even further jail releases and putting another unfunded mandate on front-line law enforcement officers who will be forced to interact with the criminals released by Prop 47.

This all boils down to the fact that Prop 47 will result in more crime, new victims, and less safety. In addition, every one of our 28 cities, already financially struggling, could see increased booking fee costs, as those are based under law upon 3-year rolling averages for each community.

Sheriff Stan Sniff, Riverside County