

# PRESS RELEASE

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**Tony Garcia, Mayor**  
**City of Coalinga**

## **For Immediate Release:**

Date: June 19, 2014

Contact Person: Rene A. Ramirez, City Manager

### **Coalinga's Claremont Custody Center Sits Empty**

The Claremont Custody Center located in Coalinga had a contract to house over 500 state inmates with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations (CDCR). It was terminated by CDCR at the direction of Governor Jerry Brown on August 7, 2011. Claremont Custody Center (CCC) and CDCR had a twenty-year relationship, housing state inmates at a considerable savings, in comparison to housing these same inmates at a state facility, saving the California tax payers millions of dollars during the life of this past contract.

With the unexpected closure of CCC, local jobs were lost affecting families' livelihoods, not to mention the negative impact to our local economy. The closure of CCC, left the City's General Fund to pay for such costs as unemployment benefits, and the City continues to pay for minimal, but important, upkeep and maintenance to care for this specialized vacant building. This has cost the City's General Fund in excess of \$2.9 million.

Currently to meet Federal Court mandates regarding the reduction to the CDCR inmate population, a need for additional bed space made the CCC a viable option again, allowing Coalinga and CDCR to begin negotiations with each other. The City of Coalinga had been negotiating in good faith with CDCR staff for approximately eight months to house state inmates. In keeping with CDCR's timelines of an anticipated contract of the reopening of CCC, additional expenses were incurred by the City's General Fund. To the City's surprise, it was informed in April 2014 that no additional bed space was needed by CDCR at this time, which runs contrary to known facts on the reoccurring topic of overcrowding in the state's male and female penal institutions.

In an addition to the excuse of not needing additional bed space in California, Coalinga was also told by CDCR staff that based on the number of exposures to Valley Fever in western Fresno County, the CCC would be a facility that would be difficult to fill by CDCR, which is a contradiction to the recently awarded contracts to house CDCR inmates at various facilities in Kern County where Valley Fever also exists.

CDCR continues to house approximately 9,000 inmates out of state, sending our tax dollar and jobs out of state. On April 1, the GEO Group, which is a corporation out of Boca Raton, Florida, announced an agreement with CDCR to house 260 female inmates at an annual cost of nine millions dollars with an option to add an additional 260 beds within the next 12 months of this newly executed contract. Also according to the GEO Group's web site, additional contracts with this private group have been executed with CDCR to house state inmates in other California facilities. Currently in Kern County, the Geo Group has several active contracts to house state inmates. The CDCR has also recently entered into contracts to house inmates in the communities of Shafter, Taft and Delano, California. All of these facilities are in Kern County where, according to local Valley Fever experts the Kern County occurrence of Valley Fever is higher than Fresno County.

On Friday April 25, 2014, Mayor Tony Garcia, Councilmember Mike Oxborrow and City Manager Rene Ramirez met with Senator Andy Vidak and Assemblyman Henry T. Perea to ask for their assistance and advocacy on this matter with CDCR. The CCC is the only remaining vacant and publicly-owned Community Correctional Facility in the Central Valley ready to house state inmates.

The City shared the following message to its elected officials, *"Sending jobs and our tax dollars out of state doesn't benefit our community. Revenue from a contract with CDCR supports Coalinga, allowing us to provide basic services such as Police, Fire, Animal Control and Code Enforcement. Without the support of a new contract, we will see major cuts to police and fire services this next fiscal year."*

Coalinga has fared better than other communities in the past and has been able to maintain and exceed levels of service during this past recession. Being fiscally responsible, and most importantly, having great city employees who have been willing to sacrifice and make salary and benefit concessions, year after year, have been the main reason why Coalinga has been able to survive California's recession.

We need the support of our community and that of the Central Valley. Send a strong message to our local elected officials in Sacramento and tell them that the CDCR's current policies to send inmates out of state and CDCR's decision to enter into contracts with a large corporation that is not based in California is not fiscally responsible to the citizens of Coalinga and California. The CDCR's decision to support a for-profit corporation versus a not-for-profit public entity, such as the City of Coalinga, is not fiscally responsible. It makes better sense for our tax dollars to be spent locally and on such basic services as police and fire protection.

Please call, write or e-mail your elected officials, and let Governor Brown, Senator Vidak and Assemblyman Perea know Coalinga needs their help in reopening Claremont Custody Center. Their assistance is critical and imperative to our financial future, and our community is tired of the excuses CDCR continues to give us regarding a contract to house state inmates at Claremont Custody Center as it relates to bed space and Valley Fever.

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