Introduction

It has been four years since Fresno businessman Mike Reynolds, who lost his daughter to a random senseless act of violence, led a criminal justice revolution in California called "Three Strikes and You're Out." The adoption of "Three Strikes" signaled a salient shift away from the failed policies of the 1960s and the 1970s that contributed to the highest crime rate in the state's history.

"Three Strikes" was implemented before a chorus of nay sayers and critics, but now after four years of historic reductions in crime, their complaints are becoming increasingly drowned out by the undeniable reality that Californians are the safest they have been in the past 30 years. This report documents why we are safer, largely due to "Three Strikes," and reveals why the mantras of "Three Strikes" critics have largely been unfulfilled prophecies.

The initial intent of "Three Strikes" was to prevent serious and violent habitual offenders from being able to repeat their criminal behavior. According to the ballot pamphlet, "It is the intent of the People of California in enacting this measure to ensure longer prison sentences and greater punishment for those who commit a felony and have been previously convicted of serious and/or violent felony offenses."1

"Three Strikes" was signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson and became effective on March 7, 1994.2 It was also passed by the people in November 1994 as Proposition 184 by a 71.85% to 28.15% margin.3

1"California Ballot Pamphlet, General Election, November 8, 1994;" Secretary of State's Office; Page 64.
3Statement of Vote. November 1994 Secretary of State's Office.

During the original debates over "Three Strikes," there were several predictions about how the new law would impact the crime rate. Other prognostications were made about prisons and Three Strikes' overall effect on the criminal justice system. Some claimed "Three Strikes" would have a limited impact on the crime rate, overcrowd the prisons and jails and overburden the justice system.4

Now, four years after the bill became law, nay sayers continue to make claims about "Three Strikes" and its impact. The Justice Policy Center claims that "Three Strikes" does not work and the reason for the drop in crime in California is more likely demographic changes.5 Families to Amend California's Three Strikes (FACTS) claim that the deterrence created by "Three Strikes" is minimal and does not outweigh the costs of the law.6
This report will demonstrate how "Three Strikes" has made California safer and discuss its effect on the entire criminal justice system.

Crime Trends

In 1994, RAND Corporation predicted a 22% to 34% drop in California's crime rate over 25 years as a result of "Three Strikes." RAND was correct in predicting that California's crime rate would drop.

2

However, it did not take 25 years for California's crime rate to drop more than 22%. It took just four years. Since the passage of "Three Strikes," in fact, the violent crime rate in California has dropped 26.9% with a 30.8% drop in the six major crime categories.

California has experienced its largest overall drop in crime over any four-year period in history with double digit drops in every major crime category between 1994 and 1997. The result of this drop in crime means that California now has its lowest murder rate since 1970 and its lowest overall crime rate in 30 years.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Type</th>
<th>Drop Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To understand this recent drop in crime, we must look at the trends in the past. For the most part, crime rates in California increased until 1980. For the first five years of the 1980s, the crime rate experienced its largest pre-Three Strikes drop. The overall crime rate dropped by 20.2%, the violent crime rate dropped by 13.8% and the homicide rate dropped by 26.4%. This five-year period of dropping crime rates, while impressive, does not compare to the dramatic drop in the crime rate since the passage of "Three Strikes."
The drop in the crime rate that California has experienced since 1993 is drastically different from the first four years of this decade (1990 - 1993) where the overall crime rate dropped only 2.4% and the violent crime rate increased 7.3%. While some may argue that the initial drop in crime occurred before "Three Strikes," clearly the dramatic change in California's crime rate started in 1994.

**California Crime Index by Category**

1990-93 Compared to 1994-97

Percent Change in Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1990-93 Change (%)</th>
<th>1994-97 Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California Crime Index</td>
<td>-2.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Offenses</td>
<td>-30.8%</td>
<td>-25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Offenses</td>
<td>-6.3%</td>
<td>-32.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 1990-93
- 1994-97
The falling crime rate in California is not isolated to any one county or region. It is occurring statewide with more than three quarters of all the counties experiencing a drop in the crime rate between 1994 and 1996. Twenty-two counties experienced a 20% or greater drop in their overall crime rate in the first three years of the "Three Strikes" era.

### 1994 - 1996 Percent Change in Rate for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Overall Crime</th>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
<th>Homicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>-23.5%</td>
<td>-22.9%</td>
<td>-30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>-24.1%</td>
<td>-24.6%</td>
<td>-38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>-26.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>-60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>-22.4%</td>
<td>-7.1%</td>
<td>-29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td>-21.1%</td>
<td>-21.6%</td>
<td>-30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>-26.8%</td>
<td>-24.6%</td>
<td>-29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>-24.2%</td>
<td>-11.5%</td>
<td>-49.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>-21.4%</td>
<td>-28.4%</td>
<td>-100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>Change 1990-93</td>
<td>Change 1990-92</td>
<td>Change 1990-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>-28.4%</td>
<td>-13.3%</td>
<td>-44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placer</td>
<td>-20.1%</td>
<td>-16.3%</td>
<td>-47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>-29.7%</td>
<td>-23.3%</td>
<td>-32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>-20.0%</td>
<td>-22.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
<td>-20.2%</td>
<td>-25.0%</td>
<td>-28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>-31.1%</td>
<td>-18.4%</td>
<td>-33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>-30.4%</td>
<td>-28.3%</td>
<td>-38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Joaquin</td>
<td>-29.0%</td>
<td>-24.3%</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Obispo</td>
<td>-20.4%</td>
<td>-18.7%</td>
<td>500.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>-34.8%</td>
<td>-31.2%</td>
<td>-67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>-24.1%</td>
<td>-13.5%</td>
<td>-30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>-28.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>-50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventura</td>
<td>-22.2%</td>
<td>-17.8%</td>
<td>-22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolo</td>
<td>-20.4%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>-31.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparison, nearly three-quarters of the counties (41 of 58) experienced an increase in their crime rate from 1990 to 1993.1

California As Compared to the Rest of the Nation

Changes in the crime rate do not happen in a vacuum. Other factors outside of the tough-on-crime measures may have an impact, such as a nationwide trend in the drop in crime. Clearly, the entire nation is experiencing a drop in crime. However, when addressing these possibilities, it is obvious that California is not following the nation but rather setting the trend for the rest of the country to follow.

California's drop in crime is nearly double that experienced in the other 49 states combined — 30.8% drop in California compared to a 17.4% decline for the rest of the nation. California is also doing substantially better in the violent crime rate compared to the rest of the nation -- 26.9% versus an 18.2% decline.12
Crime by Category, 1994-1997
California Compared to the Rest of the Nation
Percent Change in Rate

Percent change in rate

Six Major Crimes
-30.8%

Violent Offenses
-26.9%

Property Offenses*
-32.6%

-17.4%

-18.2%

-17.1%

CALIFORNIA  49 OTHER STATES  *Property offenses include only burglary and mtek
California is one of only three states to experience a double digit drop in the major crime categories between 1993 and 1996. The only two states to experience a larger drop in the major crime categories than California are Massachusetts and New York.

Both New York and Massachusetts have established several changes in their criminal justice policies which account for their plummeting drops in crime. New York saw its crime rate drop 33.4% in the six major crime categories from 1993 to 1996. New York also has a "persistent offender" statute, similar to California's "Three Strikes and You're Out." Under New York's law, a criminal who commits a Class B felony (rape, home burglary) with two or more prior violent felonies faces 20 years to life. A criminal who commits a Class A felony with two or more prior violent felonies faces a life sentence.

In addition to the "persistent offender" statute, New York City has instituted a zero tolerance policy. The police force is attempting to stop major crimes by aggressively attacking all crimes such as panhandling, solicitation and loitering. Additional
resources have been expended on targeted areas and community-oriented-policing has been implemented."

The New York City police force has increased over the past five years by approximately 7,000 officers to oversee the 8.5 million people of New York City. In comparison, California has added only 2,877 sworn peace officers to all law enforcement agencies throughout the state over the past five years. To add the same number of officers as New York City, the Los Angeles Police Department would have to nearly double the number of police officers the department currently has.

Massachusetts experienced a 28.5% drop in the six major crime categories. The crime rate there was driven down partly due to a strong commitment to community-policing. One of the most successful community-policing programs in Massachusetts has been the Safe Neighborhood Initiative, which started in one section of Boston and since has been replicated in several other Boston neighborhoods, as well as several Massachusetts cities. The police force targets specific areas known to have problems, placing more officers, more resources and more patrols in those areas. Law enforcement works with the business community and residents to establish neighborhood watches, called "Safe Neighborhood Advisory Councils," to deter and report crime. Intense focus is also put on so-called quality of life crimes, such as drug dealing and prostitution, which can have a serious negative impact on the neighborhood. In addition, the attorney general's office and the district attorney's office assign prosecutors who work solely on cases arising out of their particular safe neighborhood target area.

In addition, the Massachusetts Attorney General's office has also concentrated resources on youth violence prevention efforts. The office runs a student mediation program which teaches students to discuss problems rather than fighting. The program is in place in several schools statewide and has resulted in a dramatic turnaround in those schools.

Some of these same proposals - community-oriented-policing, targeting specific areas of crime and conflict resolution -- are already implemented in several communities throughout California. These programs, working together with "Three Strikes and You're Out," have led to California's dramatic drop in crime.

Some have claimed that a change in demographics or in the economy explains the recent drop in crime. These same groups are predicting an upswing in crime when the economy or demographics change again.
The argument about demographics is that with fewer young people breaking the law, there will be a lowering of the crime rate. The state's so-called crime ridden population (15-24) has been decreasing as a percentage of the overall population for the past 20 years. The crime ridden population peaked in 1976, while the state's crime peak was in 1980. The state experienced one of its largest drops in the so-called crime ridden age for the four years immediately preceding "Three Strikes." Yet the drop in crime during that period was less than 3% and the violent crime rate for this age group actually increased by 7%.

In 1997, the crime ridden age actually levelled off as a percentage of the population, yet the crime rate dropped significantly.

While one should never solely discount demographics factors, the decline in the crime rate is far too dramatic to be described by demographic changes.

**California Crime Index Rate, 1970-1997**
Rate per 100,000 Population

![Graph showing California Crime Index Rate from 1970 to 1997.](image)

*1997 crime rate is an estimate based on the 12-month preliminary figures.*
Others argue that changes in the economy have an inverse relationship with the crime rate -- an upswing in the economy means a downturn in the crime rate. In the early 1980s, however, while California experienced a recession, the crime rate dropped. In the early 1990s, California once again experienced a downturn in its economy yet the crime rate stayed the same.

According to James Q. Wilson, a professor at UCLA, "The crime rate has become unhinged from the business cycle. Crime is more likely to go up in periods of prosperity than it is in periods of depression."

The only factor in the last 20 years that appears to have a direct impact on the crime rate, is the tough-on-crime bills passed in late 1993 and early 1994. This does not mean that the economy and population demographics do not have any impact on the crime rate. However, their impacts are minimal compared to changes in criminal law and law enforcement.
With the passage of “Three Strikes,” some argued that the law would spur a dramatic increase in violence against law enforcement officers, placing them in danger as they sought to maintain public safety. The American Civil Liberties Union made the argument that criminals facing the prospect of a mandatory life sentence would be far more likely to resist arrest, assault officers and kill witnesses. Dave Paul, a corrections officer in Milwaukee, Oregon, wrote in an article, “Imagine a law enforcement officer trying to arrest a twice-convicted felon who has nothing to lose by using any means necessary to escape. Expect assaults on police and correctional officers to rise precipitously” (Portland Oregonian, 3/94).

Since the enactment of the “Three Strikes and You’re Out” law, increased violence against law enforcement officers has not occurred. The number of law enforcement officers assaulted has dropped 11.9% while in the three years prior to “Three Strikes” it dropped 14.9%. Both figures suggest a downward trend in the assaults on officers, disproving the prediction that violence against law enforcement officers would dramatically increase.

**Attacks on California Law Enforcement Officers**

**Number of Attacks by Year**

![Graph showing the number of attacks on California law enforcement officers from 1990 to 1996](image-url)
Not only have the number of assaults on officers dropped, so too have the total number of justifiable homicides by law enforcement. Justifiable homicides by law enforcement officers peaked in 1993, totaling 150, and have steadily declined in the "Three Strikes" era. In the three years since the law's enactment, justifiable homicides by law enforcement have decreased 32.7%.

![Graph of Justifiable Homicides, 1990-1996]

**PRISON/JAIL POPULATIONS**

The passage of the "Three Strikes" law brought significant increases to the prison sentences of defendants convicted of committing two or more "violent" and/or "serious" felonies.

Because the law increases prison sentences, limits the ability of repeat offenders to earn credits to reduce the time they spend in prison, and requires more persons to be sentenced to state prison rather than county jail, some studies have argued that the prison and jail populations would increase substantially."
Despite predictions to the contrary, the growth in the prison population since the passage of “Three Strikes” has slowed. In the four years prior to “Three Strikes” (1989-1993), the prison population increased by 37%. Since “Three Strikes” has passed, the prison population has grown only 32%.28

California Prison Population
Percent Change in Rate of Inmate Population Growth

![Diagram showing percent change in prison population growth]

1989-1993: 37%
1993-1997: 32%

Prison population growth nationally (excluding California) has increased 27% in the last four years, suggesting that California is on par with the rest of the nation.29

While the jail population has increased during the “Three Strikes” era, the average number of persons booked over this period has dropped. The average number of persons booked per month in county jails hit a record low in 1995 with 97,589. Even the highest average number of persons booked per month in the “Three Strikes” era, 103,996 in 1994, is lower than the 1993 figure of 105,593.

While California’s jail population has increased since the enactment of “Three Strikes” (13%), the increase is much smaller than that seen nationally.30 Figures released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that the number of inmates held in local jails
across the country, excluding those held in California, has increased 25% over the last four years.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{California Jail Populations}

\textit{Average Daily Population by Year}

![Graph showing the average daily population of California jails from 1990 to 1997. The population has increased over the years.]
During the debate over the “Three Strikes” law, opponents argued that not only would the prison and jail populations increase substantially, but that the prison system would become bloated with non-violent offenders serving life-terms. Seeking to prove this claim true, a study conducted by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice in 1996 concluded that 85% of persons sentenced under the “Three Strikes” law received their third strike for a non-violent offense. The study reported 192 individuals were convicted for marijuana possession while only 40 were convicted of murder, 25 of rape, and 24 of kidnaping. Allen St. Pierre, Deputy Director of NORML (Massachusetts Cannabis Reform Coalition, Inc.) commented, “People are going to jail in America for possessing marijuana. As this report clearly illustrates, the sentences can potentially be for life. This sort of illogical and fiscally irresponsible mandatory sentencing must end.”

While it is true that persons are being sentenced under the “Three Strikes” law for such non-violent crimes as drug possession and theft, these same criminals have previously been convicted of a “violent” and/or “serious” felony not once, but twice.
The purpose of “Three Strikes” is to put violent repeat felons behind bars as soon as
they break the law rather than waiting for them to violently attack another innocent
victim.

At the end of 1997, California’s inmate population totaled 152,577. Nearly a quarter
(23.2%) of the inmates, (35,411), were incarcerated for second- and third- strike
convictions.

The vast majority of those are second strikers, 31,559(89.1% of all the second- and
third- strike inmates), who face double-the-base sentence for the conviction because
of a prior violent/serious felony. Only a small fraction of those in prison, 3,852
(2.7%) are facing 25 years to life for a third strike conviction. While some studies
and organizations continue to argue that to place a person in prison for 25 years- to-
life because of a non-violent or non-serious third strike conviction is too harsh a
punishment, it clearly benefits the public safety to incarcerate repeat felons for any
felony before waiting for them to recommit a serious or violent act.34

California’s prisons are moving toward maximum capacity. According to the
Legislative Analyst’s Office, the maximum capacity without expanding the current
correctional system is 170,731 inmates.”35 As the state continues to lock up habitual
violent and/or serious felons under the “Three Strikes” law, one cost of “Three
 Strikes” becomes evident. Either the inmate population will soon consist primarily of
second and third strike inmates, or the state must look into building more prisons.

Parolees

During the “Three Strikes” era, the number of parolees has increased by more than
19,000 or 21%. The growth of the parolee population, however, has slowed down
since the passage of “Three Strikes”. The parolee population for the three years prior
to “Three Strikes” grew by more than 21,000 parolees or 31%. 
California Parolees Returning to Prison, 1985-1996
Rate per 100 Parolees by Year

Year
1985 1987 1989 1991 1993 1995 1997

Rate per 100
90.0
80.0
70.0
60.0
50.0
0
The Board of Prison Terms is focusing its efforts on parolees with serious and violent priors and gang members who violate any condition of his or her parole, rather than waiting for these parolees to commit a new felony.\textsuperscript{37}

An unintended but positive consequence of “Three Strikes” has been the impact on parolees leaving the state. More California parolees are now leaving the state than parolees from other jurisdictions entering California. This striking turnaround started in 1994. It was the first time more parolees left the state than entered since 1976. This trend has continued and in 1997 more than 1,000 net parolees left California.\textsuperscript{38}
Parolees Leaving and Entering California, 1970-1995
Number of Parolees by Year

California parolees leaving the state

Parolees from other jurisdictions entering California
Since the passage of “Three Strikes,” the parolees are not being sent back to prison for new crimes. Rather, they are returning for violating the terms of their parole. The recidivism rate of parolees returning to prison because of a new crime has dropped nearly 25%, while the three years prior to “Three Strikes” it increased by nearly 4%. The rate of return for parolees has increased by 14%, compared with a 20% drop the three years prior to “Three Strikes.”  

The growth in the number of parolees leaving California is staggering considering the Legislature passed a law in 1995 to deny parolees the ability to leave the state until all restitution and restitution fines are paid.

Savings to the State

While repeated warnings were issued from “Three Strikes” opponents about the cost to implement the new law, few have addressed the other side of the equation and the savings to the state. In measuring the savings for the state, we must measure how many fewer crimes have been committed since the implementation of “Three Strikes.”
If the 1993 crime rate had continued unabated by “Three Strikes” and other tough-on-crime measures, the effect on California would be costly - both in lives and dollars. The following chart shows the differential between the number of crimes committed each year and the number of crimes that would have been committed if the crime rate did not drop.40 Fewer crimes committed each year since the passage of “Three Strikes”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Murder</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Assault</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Vehicle Theft</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>15,768</td>
<td>4,205</td>
<td>34,434</td>
<td>14,929</td>
<td>70,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>1,313</td>
<td>23,030</td>
<td>9,536</td>
<td>64,028</td>
<td>42,141</td>
<td>140,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>34,747</td>
<td>30,438</td>
<td>110,237</td>
<td>83,480</td>
<td>261,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1,708</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>50,776</td>
<td>38,631</td>
<td>137,672</td>
<td>110,081</td>
<td>340,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,028</td>
<td>6,068</td>
<td>124,321</td>
<td>82,810</td>
<td>346,731</td>
<td>250,631</td>
<td>814,229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Had our 1993 crime rate continued unabated over these past four years, nearly 815,000 additional crimes would have been committed in our state, including more than 217,000 violent crimes. We would have suffered more than 4,000 additional homicide victims; more than 6,000 women would have been victims of rape.

How does one place a value on crimes not committed? What is the actual cost of a murder or rape? The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has estimated the average cost for each crime in a 1996 study, which measures cost per crime with tangible losses and quality of life. The tangible losses include productivity lost, medical care, public safety services, victim services and property and damage loss. The other figure includes intangible costs such as quality of life.41

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tangible cost per crimeOverall cost per crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Theft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of this study, both figures will be used to establish a range for the savings as a result of the drop in crime during the “Three Strikes” era. By combining
these figures with the number of fewer crimes committed, a savings for the state can be calculated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tangible costs</th>
<th>Overall Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>$4,148,840,000</td>
<td>$11,842,320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>$30,946,800</td>
<td>$527,916,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>$285,938,000</td>
<td>$994,568,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>$128,355,000</td>
<td>$778,414,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>$381,339,200</td>
<td>$485,340,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Theft</td>
<td>$877,208,500</td>
<td>$927,334,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,852,628,300</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,555,893,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The savings to the state due to the reduction in crime during the “Three Strikes” era is between $5.8 billion and $15.5 billion.

**Conclusion**

The impact of “Three Strikes” on the crime rate has been swift and dramatic. The crime rate has dropped more than 30% since its enactment. The entire drop in crime may not be attributed solely to “Three Strikes.” Factors such as community-oriented-policing and crime prevention must also be considered. However, the statistics show a significant correlation between “Three Strikes” and the lower crime rate.

What is clear is that other predictions, such as overburdened jail and prison facilities have not come true.
Will the correctional facilities reach an overflow point? It is difficult to determine.

However, the overall savings for the state are staggering -- between $5.8 billion and $15.5 billion, especially when compared to the less than $22,000 per year to house a serious felon.\textsuperscript{42} But the cost of unsaved lives is immeasurable.

To continue to ask the question, “Can California afford ‘Three Strikes?’” is to ask the wrong question. The real question has become “Can California afford not to have ‘Three Strikes And You’re Out?’”

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