



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from Sacbee / Opinion.

Editorial: Dumb on crime

Governor vetoes three that should be law

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, October 18, 2007

Innocent people in California are more likely to go to prison for crimes they did not commit, and the guilty are more likely to escape apprehension. Those are the potential consequences of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's vetoes of three common-sense bills.

The bills sought to make our criminal justice system not just fairer but more effective.

Senate Bill 609 by Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, would have barred prosecutors from using testimony from notoriously unreliable jailhouse informants unless such testimony was corroborated. In his veto message, the governor claimed such testimony is seldom used, but he conveniently ignored a 1989 scandal in Los Angeles County when one jailhouse snitch confessed to lying in more than a dozen cases.

Senate Bill 511 by Sen. Elaine Alquist, D-Santa Clara, would have required police to record interrogations of suspects in violent felony cases, including homicides. Such recordings provide valuable trial evidence and can protect suspects from coercion and police from unfounded charges of coercion. Schwarzenegger said such a law would deny police "flexibility."

Senate Bill 756 by Sen. Mark Ridley-Thomas, D-Los Angeles, would have created a task force to establish voluntary eyewitness identification guidelines. Mistaken identifications are the leading cause of false convictions. In recent years, DNA testing has revealed 205 wrongful convictions nationwide. More than 75 percent of those involved mistaken eyewitness testimony.

Why would police, prosecutors or the governor object to creating a panel of experts to identify best practices to avoid mistakes that send innocent people to prison while allowing the guilty to go free? Other governors have not been timid. This year five states approved laws for eyewitness identification reform and bills mandating the electronic recording of police interrogations.

The governor can claim to be tough on crime, but his vetoes display his failure to be smart about criminal justice.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

Copyright © The Sacramento Bee