



CALIFORNIA'S THREE STRIKES LAW FACT SHEET

- ✘ California's Three Strikes initiative became law on March 7, 1994. As of September 2003, California had incarcerated 42,445 people under Three Strikes.
- ✘ The law was intended to put murderers, rapists and hardcore violent criminals in prison for 25 years to life, but 65 percent of those imprisoned have been sentenced for nonviolent offenses. More Californians are serving life sentences under Three Strikes for drug possession than for second degree murder, assault with a deadly weapon and rape, combined.
- ✘ California's Three Strikes law is the harshest in the country. No other state allows someone to be convicted under Three Strikes for a nonviolent offense. Prior to California's Three Strikes law, no one in the history of the nation had received a life sentence for shoplifting. Three hundred and fifty-four people are serving life sentences for petty theft of under \$400. Robert Blasi received a 31-year sentence for stealing a pair of AA batteries. Nathan Thomas shoplifted three packs of T-shirts from J.C. Penny and was sentenced to 25 years. Brian Smith was sentenced to 25 years to life for abetting a petty theft when two women he was with shoplifted from a convenience store.
- ✘ California faces a \$15 billion budget shortfall next year.
- ✘ California spends \$5.7 billion a year on prisons. The cost of incarcerating a single inmate each year is \$30,929. Inmates over the age of 55 cost the state \$50,000 a year.
- ✘ Incarcerating nonviolent offenders under Three Strikes costs California nearly a billion dollars a year.
- ✘ Californians want the law changed and the budget balanced by cutting corrections spending.
- ✘ Sixty-five percent of Californians believe Three Strikes should focus on serious or violent felonies, not petty theft or drug possession.
- ✘ Californians are more willing to cut corrections spending to balance the state budget than any other state program.

**It's not fair. It sinks California deeper into debt.
Californians want it changed.
Make the time fit the crime.
Amend California's Three Strikes Law.**