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May 8, 2012

Senator Elaine Alquist
Senator Loni Hancock
Senator Christine Kehoe
Senator Alex Padilla

Subject: Contraband cell phones in California prisons

Dear Senators,

We thank you for the request to do this study regarding technological approaches for preventing the use of contraband cell phones in prisons. The foresight of the Senators to request a review of the investment that this report covers and the effectiveness of that investment is commendable. California again has the opportunity to be on the cutting edge of technological investment, this time in public safety. However, as you will also see in this report, achieving this leadership position in the development and deployment of the technology should be done with a full understanding of its abilities and limitations.

CCST was asked by members of the California State Senate to analyze the overall issue of contraband cell phones as well as the viability of a specific proposed system for managing cell phone access in prisons, Managed Access Systems (MAS). As many have noted, the issue of contraband cell phones is complex and will require a multipronged approach to address. Procedures being pioneered in the federal prison system to limit the influx of contraband devices offer valuable strategies for California to consider, including the use of metal detectors and entry searches for all staff and visitors – a standard practice in federal facilities, but one which is not followed in all state prisons. The federal government is also working in partnership with the cell phone industry to disable stolen cell phones, making them useless; it is likely many of those stolen phones have found their way into the prisons or that the approach can be extended to locate and disable phones not approved for use in a specific prison.

As for the proposed MAS recently contracted for by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) for managing cell phone access in prisons, our conclusions are clear: the technology shows promise, but it is not ready for deployment. In point of fact, there are no prisons anywhere in the United States using a fully functional managed access system to control cell phone use. The preliminary testing conducted so far in California has been extremely limited in scope and scale, essentially a proof of concept trial rather than a full-fledged pilot program that takes into account the complexities of interference from the prison structure itself and surrounding locale. Furthermore, MAS is not the only technology that could be used. Several other technological options, including some that were identified during the development of this report, should be considered, tested and weighed before committing to a

full investment in MAS. California could again be on the cutting edge of developing new technologies but do to do so, as noted in this report, requires the development of robust pilot project deployments of MAS or other technologies being considered.

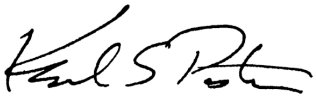
We note that as this report was being reviewed for technical accuracy and finalized for release, the California Department of Corrections proceeded to contract for a MAS. We appreciate that the management of the state's prisons is a large and complex issue, and that action is needed on this pressing issue. However, a long-term statewide investment in this technology before it is proven is, in our opinion, unwise. Our recommendations are in line with the report provided by the Inspector General in 2009, which supported steps such as investing in more thorough screening of all personnel entering and leaving the confined prison environment.

Our mandate is to provide the best possible impartial science and technology expertise and advice to California state policymakers. The role of safeguarding our state's prison system is a difficult and often thankless task. It is precisely for this reason that we believe California must plan carefully how best to manage the issue of contraband cell phones in prisons, and invest in research and development that will produce a system which meets the needs of the state through deployment of mature and tested technology.

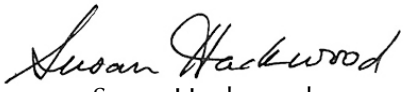
Sincerely,

Mim John
CCST Council Chair

Charles Harper
CCST Board Member and CCST Project Team Chair



Karl Pister
CCST Board Chair



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