

Early jail releases surge in Calif. after prison realignment

By Paige St. John, Los Angeles Times

Jesus Ysasaga had been arrested multiple times and ordered by the court to keep away from his ex-girlfriend. Two parole boards sentenced him to nearly a year in jail for stalking, drunkenness and battery.

But the Fresno County jail would not keep him.

Four times in the summer of 2012, authorities let Ysasaga go, refusing two times to even book him. The jail had no room.

Ysasaga's attorney, Jerry Lowe, said the parade of convicted offenders being turned away from the jail was common. "It became quite a joke," he said.

Across California, more than 13,500 inmates are being released early each month to relieve crowding in local jails – a 34 percent increase over the last three years. A *Times* investigation shows a significant shift in who is being let out of jail, how early and where.

The releases spring from an effort begun in 2011 to divert low-level offenders from crowded state prisons to local jails. The move had a cascade effect, forcing local authorities to release their least dangerous inmates to make room for more serious offenders.

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