

Sentencing Reform

A Bill to Abolish Adult Authority

Sacramento

Senator Nicholas C. Petris (Dem-Oakland) yesterday proposed abolishing the California Adult Authority and turning its duties over to a nine-member Sentencing Panel.

Petris said the panel should fix the length of all sentences and determine all parole questions.

The members of the panel would be selected by the Judicial Council, which Petris said would keep the sentencing and parole functions within the judicial branch of government.

At present the state's indeterminate sentencing law is administered and parole eligibility criteria are set by the Adult Authority, a group of appointees of the governor.

"There is no question in the minds of anyone who has

studied the problems of California's prisons about what is the single biggest obstacle to successful rehabilitation of inmates," Petris said. "It is the indeterminate sentence."

The Petris bill would require also that the Sentencing Panel set a prisoner's sentence length within six months of conviction.

In a parallel development several months ago, the Adult Authority adopted a policy that all inmates should be given interviews to lead toward a decision on a parole eligibility date within six months of imprisonment.

Corrections officials said yesterday they had taken up no position relative to the Petris bill. "This is the first we've heard of it," said Walter Barkdull, an assistant to corrections department director Raymond K. Procunier.

Petris said California in-

mates currently serve the longest average sentence in the nation— 36 months, in contrast to a national average of 24 months.

Our Correspondent
