



LOS ANGELES AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



July 17, 2017

The Honorable Board of Supervisors, County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hanh Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Consolidation and Closure of Juvenile Camps

Dear Supervisors:

Our organizations submit this letter to support ongoing discussions by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and Los Angeles County Probation Department to consolidate and close juvenile camps. We urge that as many camps as appropriate are closed to better serve youth and their families – through reducing waste, increasing the probation system’s efficiency and efficacy, repurposing the facilities for alternative use, and shifting cost-savings into community-based investments. We also urge that the planning process be made transparent to and inclusive of community-based stakeholders.

Los Angeles is home to the country’s largest Probation Department, with a budget of about \$870 million and some 600 staff. Reevaluating the probation system has long been overdue and we laud the recognition and movement by bold county leadership to shut down a number of its camps. First, many of the camps, built in the 1950s and 1960s, are old, outdated and unsuitable for youth. Second, the continued decline in camp population has left most facilities half-empty, and thus inefficient and wasteful to operate. In just the last few years, average daily populations of youth across camps has decreased by more than 50 percent (from 983 in FY 2012-13 to 482 in FY 2016-17 to its current level 370).

No doubt these reductions in youth incarceration in Los Angeles and all across the state are due in part to advocacy, research and lived experience establishing that incarceration can be harmful. Indeed internationally, the guiding principle that detention must be a last resort for the shortest duration possible has long been embedded in such protocols as the Convention on the Rights of the Child – which 196 countries are party to but the United States has yet to ratify. Social science and medical research are conclusive that incarceration is a risk to health – for instance, incarcerated youth face disproportionately higher morbidity and higher mortality compared to the general adolescent population, and suffer higher rates of medical and mental



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health needs entering and leaving the system. Overall, incarceration has been correlated with youth faring worse health and social functioning across their life course. Most importantly, countless youth who have been incarcerated can attest themselves to the adverse impacts and trauma of being confined in lock-ups. In addition, it undeniable that incarceration has disproportionately and inequitably impacted poor communities and communities of color.

Even as the County redesigned and opened Campus Kilpatrick on July 3, it is critical that the County close additional facilities. Ensuring that remaining facilities are transformed to be therapeutic, education and youth-development focused, and ensuring incarceration is reserved for the rarest of cases are both part of the “LA Model.” In short, the county’s multi-year, collaborative visioning of the LA Model has fundamentally included an intent to reduce this County’s capacity to incarcerate.

Going forward, we urge that as many camps as appropriate are closed. Second, we ask that a clear plan be made for returning the facilities to the County to be repurposed for alternative use. Third, we advocate for shifting the cost-savings from consolidation and closure into community-based, youth development interventions and supports. Fourth, we ask that the planning and discussion about camp closures be made public and transparent. Doing so would ensure diverse expertise be included in reimagining how this County invests in youth who have or are at-risk of having probation system contact.

Thank you for your leadership and acknowledgment of the need for closing camps in Los Angeles. We look forward to engaging further with the Board of Supervisors and Probation Department as consolidation and closure plans are further defined and implemented.

Sincerely,

Patricia Soung, Children’s Defense Fund-California

Kim McGill, Youth Justice Coalition

Javier Stauring, Healing Dialogue and Action

Ruth Cusick, Public Counsel

Marcus Castain, Coalition for Engaged Education

Kaile Shilling, Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network

Josh Green, Urban Peace Institute

Heather Birdsall, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

Bikila Ochoa, Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Peter Eliasberg, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California