

Transforming the California Youth Authority

In the wake of a series of recently-publicized scandals revealing the long term, systematic failure of the California Youth Authority to achieve its mission of rehabilitation, the undersigned organizations urge the state to take the following actions to transform the CYA.

I. Reduce the CYA Population

California has the second highest youth incarceration rate in the United States. At a cost of over \$80,000 per youth per year, and with a reoffense rate exceeding 90%, we believe that the California Youth Authority's population can and should be reduced as soon as possible. California needs a state-run Youth Authority to work with youth convicted of the most violent acts; however, at present, the CYA houses too many moderate offenders under egregious conditions of confinement – many of whom could be handled safely and at lower cost in community based settings. The following mechanisms would result in reducing the population by at least 2,000:

- **Enhanced reentry programming:** Rather than serving their entire sentence in locked custody, Youth Authority wards should spend the final 12 – 18 months of their sentence in rigorous, evidenced based, community programs in or very near their own communities.
- **Challenge grant funding for specific populations:** Mentally disabled and developmentally disabled youth and female wards are in need of specialized programming to facilitate their rehabilitation. We urge the creation of a competitive grant program for counties and treatment providers to present proposals to work with these specialized populations in community-based settings.
- **Diverting low-end offenders from confinement:** Youth convicted of lightweight offenses have no place in the state's most expensive and secure settings – the California Youth Authority. They should be diverted from ever entering locked state facilities by creating a network of community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration.
- **Maximizing community participation:** In the development of all of the aforementioned programs, program designs should be approved and funds allocated by oversight bodies with broad stakeholder representation, including community members and representatives from community-based organizations that serve system-involved youth. Youth should also be served in programs in or near their home communities whenever possible to maximize their potential for successful community reintegration. Administrative control and oversight of program design, proposal review and program monitoring should be given to government agencies responsible for youth and community development rather than public safety/law enforcement in order to ensure the more successful reintegration of youth back into communities.

II. Reallocate Funds to Community-Based Programs

The state should carefully calculate the bed and cost savings that would be realized from the aforementioned recommendations and reallocate those savings from the California Youth Authority's \$385 million budget to fund community based programming. Community-based programs that are owned and operated by members of the specific communities they serve and have a demonstrable track record of success in these communities should receive funding priority.

III. Phase Out Youth Prisons, Phase In Small, Home-like Rehabilitation Centers

The state should develop an immediate plan to begin phasing out all 10 of the CYA's large, prison-like youth institutions. In their place, the state should create small (no larger than 40 beds each), home-like secure facilities for the remaining youth who need close monitoring. These facilities should be run by youth specialists, provide extensive individual programming, and engage families in the rehabilitation process. They should also be close to youths' home communities and allow outside groups to provide services to the young people to increase the system's transparency. In support of the rehabilitative goals of juvenile justice, civilian access to the facilities and independent monitoring of the conditions of care is crucial. Youth need safe and effective means to report on their experiences and the broader public has the right to accurate assessments of the effectiveness of the CYA's programming.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in Missouri, in which no facilities contain more than 40 youths, 70 percent of youth released in 1999 avoided recommitment to a correctional program within three years. Furthermore, According to Missouri Department of Juvenile Services Director Mark Steward, Over the past 15 years, there has not been a serious injury during a restraint, a lawsuit or a formal complaint filed by parents.

IV. Reject any efforts to transfer more youth into adult prisons

This includes any proposals to lower the age of jurisdiction of the CYA from 25 years to 22 years and to transfer more youth from CYA into adult prisons.

California Organizations

- ACLU of Northern California
- ACLU of Southern California
- Jeff Adachi, SF Public Defender
- At The Crossroads
- Father Greg Boyle/Homeboy Industries
- Buddhist Peace Fellowship
- California Adolescent Health Collaborative
- California Attorneys for Criminal Justice
- California Interfaith Alliance for Prison Reform
- Californians for Justice
- Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, District 5

- Center for Family Counseling
- Commonweal
- Diogenes Youth Services, Inc.
- Dolores Mission Church
- Faith Communities for Families and Children
- Fresno EOC Sanctuary Youth Project
- Honorable LaDoris H. Cordell, Retired State Court Judge, Vice Provost, Stanford University
- Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
- Delancey Street Foundation
- Each One Reach One
- Ella Baker Center/Books Not Bars
- The First Place Fund for Youth
- A Home Within
- Mendocino County Youth Project
- Mental Health Association in California
- National Council on Crime and Delinquency
- Reverend Dorsey O'Blake, Fellowship Church
- Office of Restorative Justice/Detention Ministry, Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- Prison Law Office
- Progress Foundation
- The Beat Within/Pacific News Service
- The Mentoring Center
- W. Haywood Burns Institute
- Youth Horizons
- Youth Law Center
- Youth Justice Coalition/Free LA
- Philip Zimbardo, Ph.D, Stanford University, Department of Psychology

Organizations Based Outside of California

- American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project
- Amnesty International USA
- Children's Defense Fund
- Coalition for Juvenile Justice
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Human Rights Watch
- Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
- Justice Policy Institute
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- National Association of Sentencing Advocates
- School Social Work Association of America
- The Sentencing Project
- Unitarian Universalists for Drug Policy Reform