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Future of Central Juvenile Hall: Feasibility Study and Plan

Central Juvenile Hall, also known as Eastlake Juvenile Hall, constructed in 1912, was Los Angeles County’s (County) first, permanent juvenile detention facility and is currently one of two open juvenile halls. For decades, Central Juvenile Hall, occupying almost 22 acres, has been used to incarcerate thousands of youth, boys and girls.

Over its 110 years of existence, it has sustained criticisms and has been subjected to multiple lawsuits and consent decrees for poor living conditions and alarming treatment of the youth incarcerated in its cells.

For years, scathing reports have been written about Central Juvenile Hall. In a 1999 Grand Jury report¹, it detailed run-down conditions at Central Juvenile Hall, and in 2014, another Los Angeles County Grand Jury report² proposed that Central Juvenile Hall be torn down due to deplorable conditions and poor treatment of the youth. That

¹ <http://grandjury.co.la.ca.us/gjury99/reportgj-21.htm>

² http://grandjury.co.la.ca.us/pdf/2013-2014_Final.pdf

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same year, members of the Board of Supervisors (Board) encouraged and supported the tear down of Central Juvenile Hall.

On January 13, 2021, after three years of investigation by the California Department of Justice (Cal DOJ), the County entered into a settlement agreement to “improve the conditions and education services in the county’s juvenile halls.”³ The investigation noted “serious deficiencies regarding the treatment and conditions of confinement of youth in juvenile detention in the county...”⁴

Months later, in September 2021, the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), found Central Juvenile Hall and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall “unsuitable for the confinement of youth.”⁵ Prior to this finding, the Probation Department developed a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) in response to being found out of compliance “with several of the [BSCC’s] regulations.”⁶ Up to that point, the BSCC had never found a juvenile correctional facility unsuitable for youth in the State of California.

Despite support from the BSCC, the Probation Department continues to fall out of compliance laid out in its CAP, as recently as last month, when the BSCC found additional areas of non-compliance during its inspection. The Probation Department is taking the issue of non-compliance seriously, however, to come into full compliance, major work needs to be done such as facility repairs, training of staff, and other steps to ensure the Probation Department passes its next BSCC inspection.

A lot of effort will be going into preparing for the BSCC inspection, including

³ <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-becerra-los-angeles-county-enter-groundbreaking-settlements>

⁴ Id.

⁵ <https://www.bscc.ca.gov/news/bscc-finds-la-juvenile-halls-unsuitable-for-confinement-of-minors/>

⁶ Id.

paying for repairs, painting, re-painting, and replacement of fixtures to maintain areas of Central Juvenile Hall. Given the age of Central Juvenile Hall, this a Sisyphean task--a continuous and expensive problem to maintain an aging and decrepit facility. In light of the never-ending issues with the facility's suitability, we must question whether the facility can even be fully repaired. It is time to assess all possibilities and ask whether it make more sense—fiscally and morally—to close Central Juvenile Hall.

The question of whether the Board should close Central Juvenile Hall, or any other Probation camps and halls, is not new nor has the Board shied away from doing so, in fact, since 2016, the Board explored the closure of Probation camps and halls⁷ and over the years, the Board closed and re-purposed several camps and halls such as:

- Camp Gonzalez, closed in 2017 to soon become a fire camp for formerly incarcerated youth.⁸
- Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, closed in 2019 after serious allegations of low staff morale and staff abusing incarcerated youth.⁹ In Fall of 2020, “a portion of the facility [was converted] into a crisis/bridge housing program for young women who are experiencing homelessness.”¹⁰
- Camp Challenger was closed in 2019 to be “converted into a pilot residential vocational training center for young adults ages 18-25.”¹¹

Furthermore, the incarcerated youth population is at historic lows. As of March 10,

⁷ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/101600.pdf>

⁸ <https://imprintnews.org/news-2/los-angeles-juvenile-detention-camp-slated-close-will-see-second-life-voluntary-job-training-center/29495>; <https://probation.lacounty.gov/l-a-probation-completes-facility-consolidation-plan-by-closing-nine-juvenile-facilities-in-two-years/>

⁹ <https://www.thedowneypatriot.com/articles/la-county-sets-date-for-los-padrinos-juvenile-hall-closure>

¹⁰ <https://jovenesinc.org/los-padrinos/>

¹¹ https://www.avpress.com/news/youths-are-leaving-challenger-detention-center/article_35909d68-a9e5-11e9-85a3-03d78a50b46d.html

2022, there were 289 youth in the juvenile halls and 108 adjudicated youth in the camps. As a comparison, in 1998, the population in the halls alone was almost 2,000 youth.¹²

The Board is actualizing and fulfilling “Youth Justice Reimagined”¹³ (YJR) in LA County, by approving \$75 million in funding and committing to the creation of a Department of Youth Development (DYD)¹⁴. In spirit of the YJR values and commitment to our at-risk youth, this Board needs to continue its pledge and decide on the future of Central Juvenile Hall.

It is evident that to continue to reduce the Probation facilities’ footprint and incarcerated youth population and decarceration of youth in the County’s camps and halls, Central Juvenile Hall needs to be shuttered, demolished, and a brighter future planned to replace its blight mark on LA County history.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Probation Department and the Department of Public Works, in conjunction with the Courts, Union Partners, Chief Executive Office, County Counsel, Public Defender, Alternate Public Defender, District Attorney, and other relevant County Departments to conduct a Central Juvenile Hall Closure Feasibility Study and prepare a report back in writing to the Board within 120 days to include timelines, cost, and other relevant information for the successful closure and demolition of Central Juvenile Hall and to include:

¹² <http://grandjury.co.la.ca.us/gjury99/reportgj-21.htm>

¹³ <https://lacyouthjustice.org/>

¹⁴ <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/166845.pdf>

- a. A plan to transfer youth at Central Juvenile Hall to Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall.
- b. A transportation plan for service providers, families, court visits, medical and mental health visits, and attorneys.
- c. A family visiting plan that includes exploring and identifying off-site locations for a visiting hub and/or center to encourage visitation and reunification.
- d. A schedule for a robust engagement plan, led by the Probation Oversight Commission, to understand potential impact on the Courts, staff, and community, including incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth, due to the closure of Central Juvenile Hall.
- e. A plan that includes a timeline and budget for modifications, reconfigurations, and upgrades, to create a “home-like” environment, compliant with the Cal DOJ settlement agreement, at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, including the demolition of the “Compound”, to become the only Probation facility in LA County to hold pre-dispositioned youth. The plan should also include:
 - i. Instituting the LA Model.
 - ii. Duplicating Camp Kilpatrick’s Credible Messenger program.
 - iii. Identifying adequate space to provide robust programming and services, including individual, small and large group sessions; indoor and outdoor work, recreational, and green spaces; higher education, career development, and vocational training classes and

programs; arts and sports programs; and other extracurricular activities provided by educational partners and community-based service providers. Adequate space should also be identified for family visitation, administrative, medical, and mental health offices.

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