COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
PROBATION DEPARTMENT

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To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich
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From: Paul Higa
Chief Probation Officer

Subject: **YOUTH-ON-YOUTH VIOLENCE AND OTHER DISTURBANCES IN PROBATION JUVENILE CAMPS AND HALLS**

As a result of the February 25, 2006 racially-motivated disturbance involving minors at Camp Ronald McNair, on February 28, 2006, on motion of Mayor Antonovich, your Board instructed the Probation Department to provide a report within 15 days relative to youth-on-youth violence and other disturbances in the juvenile camps and halls, including an assessment of the causes leading to the increase in the number of incidents and the Department's actions, proposed or implemented, to prevent these incidents from occurring.

OVERVIEW

Since 2004, the Probation Department has investigated 11 significant disturbances and documented an increase in physical altercations amongst minors housed in our camps and juvenile halls. An analysis of these incidents should recognize the Probation Department's challenge to provide appropriate services to an increasingly difficult and complex youth population in comparison with previous years.

The juvenile justice system is not insulated from the same racial and gang tensions that threaten our communities. The same conflicts that are reflected in the schools, communities, and jails are reflected in the camps and juvenile halls. According to a recent report by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, although hate crimes were decreasing in 2004, racially-motivated gang violence between African-Americans and Latinos were increasing, especially among juveniles.

Overall, it is becoming more evident that the frequency and intensity of violence requires a higher level of staff supervision, increased training of staff, enhanced mental health services, additional surveillance equipment, and improved collaboration with community-based organizations to reduce racial tensions. Further, there is a need for the segregation of our more troubled youth from other minors.

The Department of Justice monitors opined in their recent reports that the staffing in the juvenile halls needed to be increased to reduce the youth-on-youth violence. Similarly, the need for increased staffing is vital to impact the youth-on-youth violence in the camps. Like the recent jail disturbances, the camps have open-dorm settings. The dorm settings provide a less secure setting than housing youth in individual rooms. An interpersonal conflict between a couple of youth too frequently grows quickly into disruptions involving many others resulting in a very volatile situation.

This report provides 1) youth-on-youth violence statistics and cites various incidents relative to youth fights and major disturbances in our camps and halls; 2) the causes of youth violence; 3) our actions taken and interventions; and 4) our proposed interventions to mitigate these reoccurrences in our camps and halls.

I. FIGHTS AND RECENT MAJOR DISTURBANCES IN CAMPS AND HALLS

As reflected below, over the past two years, our records indicate that there has been a significant increase in fights and major disturbances amongst minors both in camps and halls.

➢ *Camp Statistics*

In 2005, there were 2,630 fights in our camps in comparison to 1,934 in the prior year, representing a 36 percent increase. The major disturbance quantified below is the Camp Glenn Rockey incident of October 2005, and represents a 100 percent increase since there were no major disturbances in 2004.

	2004	2005	Variance	%
Youth Fights	1,934	2,630	696	36%
Major Disturbances	0	1	1	100%

In addition, over the past couple of months, 351 fights have occurred within our camp facilities, one of which led to the major disturbance at Camp McNair. The majority of the fights and the two camp disturbances were attributed primarily to racial tensions, exacerbated by intense gang loyalties.

➢ ***Juvenile Hall Statistics***

In 2005, there were 2,738 fights in our halls in comparison to 2,108 in the prior year, representing a 29 percent increase. In addition, there were six major disturbances that occurred during the fourth quarter of 2005, representing a 100 percent increase from 2004.

	2004	2005	Variance	%
Youth Fights	2,108	2,738	630	29%
Major Disturbances	3	6	3	100%

As you are aware, on January 31, 2006, your Board approved $6.5 million to provide for the partial-year funding of 237 Probation and 10 Mental Health positions to primarily increase supervision of minors and mental health services at the three juvenile halls – we anticipate this increase in staff would once fully trained effectuate a reduction in youth-on-youth violence.

The following provides an overview of the incidents that occurred in 2005 and the most recent one of February 2006, including the filing of new petitions, as applicable.

➢ ***Recent Major Camp Disturbance Incidents***

Camp Glenn Rockey – On October 22, 2005, at approximately 7:30 p.m., 115 minors participated in a melee at Camp Glenn Rockey due to increasing racial tensions between Hispanic and African-American minors. The fighting began when a Hispanic minor with racially-provocative tattoos began hitting an African-American youth at a pre-designated time on the recreation field. For over an hour, minors vandalized the facility and threw bricks and trash cans at each other and at staff which resulted in several minor injuries. Unlike Camp McNair and the incident described further below, since Camp Rockey is a stand-alone facility, there were no additional staff available to provide assistance. Consequently, given the situation, law enforcement resources were called to intervene to stop the fighting. All minors were temporarily relocated from Camp Rockey while significant repairs were made to the facility. Upon their return, diversity issues were explored with the assistance of a community-based organization. As a result of this incident, 20 minors were returned to court with the filing of new petitions.

Camp Ronald McNair – On February 25, 2006, at approximately 10:30 p.m., a racially-motivated disturbance occurred involving Hispanic and African-American minors at Camp McNair, one of six camps located on the grounds of Challenger Memorial Youth Center. Multiple fights occurred on one side of the dormitory, which spread to the other side. Nearly 100 minors participated in this pre-planned altercation. Staff from other facilities at CMYC were available and quickly

intervened to help quell the disturbance. The additional presence of night staff was also beneficial. One minor was injured and 30 minors were moved to the Special Housing Unit. The preliminary investigation into this incident suggests a need for more structured programming along with diversity education. As a result of this incident, 13 minors were returned to court with the filing of new petitions.

➢ ***Recent Major Hall Disturbance Incidents***

Central Juvenile Hall – On September 7, 2005, during lunch at approximately 12:35 p.m., several minors housed in a boys' Special Handling Unit dayroom, which houses minors with severely mentally ill issues or disruptive behavior became non-compliant to staff instructions and caused a table laden with food to collapse to the floor by dislodging a table-leg. Minors were instructed to go to their rooms; however, they did not initially comply. Staff assigned minors to begin cleaning up the spilled food with brooms and mops, etc. A minor assigned this task broke a broom handle in half, while another minor took a broom and removed the handle base. These two minors and several others began breaking lights in the dayroom with the broom handles, striking staff with the broom handles and throwing chairs at the staff. Other staff arrived in the unit and utilized pepper spray to quell the disturbance. Several minors sustained minor injuries and one staff member sustained an injury to his ribs after being struck with the broom. This disturbance was neither racial nor gang-related. The investigation was turned over to the Los Angeles Police Department and resulted in the filing of new charges against two of the minors who instigated the incident.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall -- On October 1, 2005, at approximately 4:45 p.m., 28 minors in an unfit unit were involved in a disturbance that appeared to have both gang and racial undertones. An investigation revealed that this incident began as a fight between two gangs but escalated and involved additional minors along racial lines. Staff quickly intervened and stopped the disturbance; two minors sustained injuries that required their transfer to a local hospital for treatment where they were both treated and returned to the facility the same day. No staff were injured during the incident. New petitions against 12 of the instigators were brought to the District Attorney's Office.

Central Juvenile Hall – On October 1, 2005, at approximately 7:40 p.m., 35 minors were involved in a disturbance that occurred in a dayroom that appeared to have both gang and racial undertones. The incident began when a Hispanic minor and an African-American minor became involved in an altercation. Numerous other Hispanic minors then attacked a group of five African-American minors; two minors sustained injuries that required their transfer to a local hospital for treatment. The minors were both treated and returned to the facility the same day. No staff were injured during the incident. Additional charges were filed against the instigators of the incident.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall – On October 10, 2005, during lunch at approximately 12:30 p.m., 2 minors engaged in a racially-motivated fight in a dayroom, which soon escalated into a disturbance involving an additional 13 minors – 8 of the minors were Hispanic and 5 were African-American. The minors engaged in punches and throwing chairs at each other for approximately fifteen minutes until sufficient staff had arrived to regain control. One minor and one staff were injured and required further treatment at local hospitals. A petition was filed against the main instigator.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall – On November 8, 2005 at approximately 7:30 p.m., 14 Hispanic and 5 African-American minors in an unfit unit were involved in a racial disturbance. The minors were involved in dayroom activities when several minors stood up and began making racial remarks to each other. The minors then began to fight along racial lines. The incident was resolved without injury to minors or staff. Three of the instigators were transferred to the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), formerly California Youth Authority (CYA) Drake living unit while some of the other minors were returned to court on probation violations.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall – On November 10, 2005, approximately 15 minors in an unfit unit engaged in a racially-motivated disturbance in one of the dayrooms. The incident initially involved two minors from rival gangs but spread quickly when several Hispanic minors stood up and yelled a derogatory slur towards African-American minors. Staff responded quickly and defused the incident. There were no serious injuries to minors or staff. This incident occurred in a unit that houses minors who are classified as High-Risk Offenders, Pending Fitness, or are awaiting delivery to the DJJ. The instigators of this incident were transferred to the Special Handling Unit and were reviewed for additional charges. The majority of the minors involved in the incident were pending fitness hearings. Eight minors were identified as instigators of the incident. Charges were filed on two of the instigators. Of the eight most seriously involved, two minors have since been committed to camp and DJJ respectively. The remaining six minors are still in custody at BJNJH pending their fitness hearings.

II. CAUSES OF INCREASED YOUTH-ON-YOUTH VIOLENCE IN CAMPS & HALLS

During recent years, there has been an increased need for rehabilitation services to treat minors entering the detention system, especially those with serious mental health issues, gang entrenchment, assaultive behavior and major conduct disorders. This and the following are key factors specifically leading to increased levels of youth-on-youth violence in our camps and halls:

- ***Insufficient Staffing for Violence Prevention*** – As noted in the recent Department of Justice reports, there is a direct correlation between adequate staffing and effectuating a reduction in youth-on-youth violence. While the facilities have historically had sufficient staff to intervene once fights occur,

there has been a need for an increased staffing level to prevent fights from occurring in the first place. Further, additional staffing would enable the facilities to prevent isolated situations from escalating into major disruptions by intervening quickly and effectively.

- ***Insufficient Training*** – Due to the loss of State training funds, the ability to provide optimal job-related training has suffered. While the implementation of bureau-specific training academies has been a step forward, all staff working with minors need additional training in the areas of supervision, conflict de-escalation, and crisis management. Appropriate and timely staff intervention is a critical part of preventing violence within our facilities.

- ***Increased Mental Health Needs*** – An increasing number of minors with serious mental health issues have been ordered to Probation camp where there are limited resources to provide the appropriate treatment. These minors are often sources of program disruption and irritation to other minors that results in physical altercations.

- ***Short-Term (3-month) Camp Program*** – A significant number of the minors in camp are placed for a period of only three months. Consequently, there is less ability for relationship building with staff and other minors. These relationships are important in terms of receiving information about planned unrest and to de-escalating disagreements between minors before they escalate into a fight. This issue is being addressed in our proposed Camp Redesign, which we anticipate finalizing by April 1, 2006.

- ***Facility Location & Configuration*** – Many camp facilities are vulnerable to security breaches as they are located in relatively isolated areas. As a result, minors are aware there are limited immediate resources present to respond to a significant disturbance and that law enforcement response time may be delayed. The dorm situations can be a volatile housing situation when it is necessary to reestablish group control with limited staff. Camps are not staffed with back up security staff to respond should isolated incidents escalate and involve numerous youth.

  With regard to the juvenile halls, they generally have the flexibility to redirect other juvenile hall staff from other areas of the institution that can immediately respond. They are also immediately proximate to local law enforcement, which can respond, and in force, if the situation escalates out of control.

- ***Law Enforcement Suppression Operations*** – Significant suppression efforts by law enforcement agencies against gang members in the communities have led to a large number of "shot callers", i.e., individuals who wield heavy influence over other gang members, being placed in both camps and halls.

Other gang members often engage in attacking gang rivals at the behest of or to impress these more sophisticated individuals.

- ***Community Influences*** – Minors are receiving a significant amount of inflammatory information through visitations, telephone calls and by mail regarding the ongoing gang and racial violence occurring in schools and at state and local correctional facilities. In addition, families often share day-to-day accounts of gang violence in the communities. As this information is carried into Probation facilities, conflicts paralleling what is occurring within the community erupt.

- ***Equipment Needs*** – During the past several years, camps have utilized equipment such as radios that are insufficient in quantity and often out-dated. Other types of safety-related equipment, such as closed-circuit television systems, have not been available to camp and hall facilities except in isolated units. The lack of cameras impedes the ability to accurately identify perpetrators involved especially in mass disruptions that would improve the filing of new charges.

- ***Shortage of Adequate Supportive Services*** – There is an insufficient level of counseling services and educational programs dealing with anger management, conflict resolution, and diversity issues provided to minors in the halls and camps.

III. CURRENT INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE VIOLENCE IN CAMPS & HALLS

The following are actions taken and our current interventions to mitigate violence in our camps and halls:

- ✓ We are working with the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) on the potential identification of funds to purchase and install closed-circuit television cameras for each camp and juvenile hall. This has been submitted to the CAO as part of our FY 2006-07 Official Budget request.

- ✓ The Department is also assessing the need for additional radios to ensure communication between staff and the main office. Radio communication is critical to ensure timely response to developing situations and the ability to effectively deploy staff. The Department expects this assessment to be completed by April 15, 2006.

- ✓ A Camp Assessment Unit is being developed at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall to further evaluate each minor ordered to camp. This will include a more comprehensive assessment of issues involving mental health, health evaluation, educational, gang activity, prior violence, and prior history of abuse.

This assessment will allow for an improved classification and placement in camps and the development of a more meaningful in camp and transition plan. In some cases there may be a need to consider returning the case to court for the court's consideration of an alternative disposition.

- ✓ The small group processes to enhance minor and staff relationships have been implemented as a mandated practice in the camps. This will increase the staff's engagement and communication with youth. This was implemented March 1, 2006.

- ✓ Utilizing the additional staffing resources recently approved for the juvenile halls to improve group supervision, reduce youth-on-youth violence and provide effective management of at-risk mentally ill youth. Many of these mentally ill youth are directly involved in incidents of violence in the juvenile halls.

- ✓ Similar to the recent identification of additional staffing resources needed for our halls, the Department is in the process of reviewing the current camp staffing patterns to assess what is required at each location to provide enhanced casework, programming and supervision services at each location. The Department expects to have completed this assessment by April 15, 2006.

IV. PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE VIOLENCE IN CAMPS & HALLS

The following are our proposed interventions to mitigate violence in our camps and halls:

- Consistent with our critical need and the recent program audit recommendations, seek to increase staffing within each camp facility in order to provide effective group supervision, direct services, and case management.

- Continue the aggressive hiring plan to bring on the additional juvenile hall staff by April 18, 2006. Assign the staff once trained to supplement current staffing in the halls.

- Improve camp and juvenile hall staff training in the areas of counseling, crisis and behavior management, identification of mental health and gender-specific issues, mediation and case management techniques.

- Implement a facility-wide behavior management program in the juvenile halls to address youth-on-youth violence issues. Through the behavior management programming activities, train youth in building competencies including anger management, building self-esteem, avoiding gang activities, substance abuse prevention, increasing victim awareness and literacy.

- While currently in limited areas of the camps and halls, fully utilize the available video monitoring of dormitory and other areas through the use of closed-circuit television systems; use the video to improve filing of new petitions. Seek to expand the CCTV system for all camps and halls.

- Encourage the placement of minors with significant mental health issues into appropriate community-based treatment programs rather than the juvenile hall or camp setting.

- Assign high-risk camp youth in the specialized, more physically secure camp setting at CMYC by increasing the number of "Violence Alternative Prevention" programs.

- Create additional specialized units in juvenile halls that will focus on minors with mental health issues and who display very aggressive behaviors; there is a need for separate units for males and females. There are currently two such units and will be expanded to four.

- Increase contracts and build partnerships with community-based organizations to help promote an awareness of and respect for diversity and gang intervention, gender-specific programming activities, substance abuse treatment, writing skills classes, and violence prevention initiatives.

- Enhance data management systems in order to improve data collection, accurate trend analysis, staff accountability and performance.

- Promptly return to court those minors that become involved in assaultive incidents and thereby demonstrate an inability to benefit from the camp program for consideration of an alternative disposition. Such actions are needed to ensure that youth are held accountable for violent and assaultive behaviors.

CONCLUSION

The Department is achieving some progress in service delivery, including implementing certain strategies to reduce youth-on-youth violence, primarily as a result of your Board's approval of additional resources for the juvenile halls. We believe that the additional staff, increased training, and improved protocols will aid to reduce the violence in the halls.

The Department is in the process of completing by April 1, 2006 the development of a redesign of our camp system – one that is driven by evidence-based practices and performance measures. As part of that redesign, the plan will identify the need for improved supervision, an enhanced staffing level, higher expectations of staff, and a significant need for more training. We believe that the implementation of these new

directions will also give us new skills, tools, and resources to reduce violence in the camps.

Please call me if you have any questions or require additional information, or your staff may contact Shirley Alexander, Chief, Residential Treatment Services Bureau at (562) 940-2508, or Ron Barrett, Chief, Detention Services Bureau at (562) 940-2503.

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