



**PROBATION COMMISSION
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

April 25, 2019

Terri L. McDonald, Chief Probation Officer
9150 Imperial Hwy
Downey, California 90242

Dear Chief McDonald:

As designated representative of the Board of Supervisors and president of the County Probation Commission, I'm writing to you concerning what I observed and heard during my visit at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall on April 23, 2019. In view of the serious issues I witnessed, I believe it is my duty to notify you of my findings.

As you may recall, we sent you a previous notification about conditions at the facility on October 8th, 2018. Members of the Probation Commission advised you that the conditions in the Hall were extremely unsafe both for the youth housed there and the staff. Since then, it would appear conditions have worsened.

On April 22, 2019, I was notified by email of a request to meet with an employee, DSO Letcher. Below is text from the email and reason for my visit to Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall:

"DSO Letcher contacted the Chief's office this morning, requesting that the Probation Commissioners (Joe Gardner) visit BJNJH to see the chaos that is going on at the hall specifically unit NO. She was very upset, quoted "kids are out of control, attacking the staff, the Commissioners need to see what is really going on over here" She mentioned that she will go to the media, she is tired of staff calling out, quitting because they are not allowed to do their job without being questioned, discipline or fired... the kids win. She also mentioned a massive employee walk-out if no one comes out there(commissioners)."

I arrived at the facility at 1522 hours and sought out DSO Letcher. After securing a minor she was supervising, she conveyed her concerns and frustration with the events that have transpired over the last few days. She told me several minors in Units N and O had completely trashed the area over the weekend. The area was used as the HOPE Center. DSO Letcher said all the minors assigned there had to be moved out to other housing units on the campus. DSO Letcher walked me over to the building and allowed me to look inside. I saw a significant amount of damage to the building. There were broken windows and walls. Ceiling tiles were pulled down and phones in the common areas were broken. There was debris all over the floor. There was gang-related graffiti on doors and several walls. The graffiti was applied by black felt marker. Much of the damage appeared to have taken place over a span of time. I took several photos of the damage. For further details see the end of this document. It would appear the building will require extensive repair. I asked DSO Letcher if plans were being made to charge those minors for the vandalism. DSO Letcher said she was not sure. She said judges have a history of being lenient on new crimes committed at the Hall.

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DSO expressed that her and her co-workers are working at the breaking point. They are constantly being held over each day, working several hours of mandatory overtime each week.

She mentioned minors from Los Padrinos have been brought to the Hall, I asked her if any of the staff from Los Padrinos were brought to help with the supervision of those minors. She said "no."

DOS Letcher said staff at Nidorf have had to endure resignations of personnel and daily call-outs for fatigue and illness. She mentioned there is generally no back-up personnel. Fights and assaults are a daily occurrence. Emergency calls from staff for help go with delayed responses or no response at all because staff is dedicated to watching minors in other secure areas of the facility. She also said staff seem to be afraid to take physical action or use force to control combative youth. DSO Letcher said reports of banning pepper spray and the recent criminal charging of several staff has created the reluctance or confusion about when to apply use of force.

As we exited the building, DSO Letcher pointed out that all the back stops and the goal posts were removed to the field. She said their removal was in response to an incident in which a minor escaped a building and climbed onto the goal post and kept staff at bay for six hours.

DSO Letcher told me new staff do not provide structure and allow minors to run their own program, making it difficult for other shifts and personnel.

DSO Letcher said there are many dedicated staff at Nidorf. Some, like herself work at the detriment to their health. She expressed great concern to their safety. Staff nearby appeared to support her statements.

I left DSO Letcher and sought out the Officer of the Day. Her name was Christina Manriquez. She was with Assistant Superintendent Carlos Coronado. I asked her to confirm how many minors were assigned to Units N and O. She said there were nine. I asked about how many minors were transferred to Nidorf from Los Padrinos. She said 77 have arrived over the last month. I asked if any of the staff came from Los Padrinos to assist with the supervision of those minors. She said "no." I asked them both about how many staff were on "injured on duty" status. Both agreed it was about 85. She told me she has had to hold over 25 staff in the last several days. I left the facility at 1647 hours.

Based on my observations and conversations with staff, there continues to be substantial problems at the facility. The facility is significantly understaffed every day. Employees are stated to be quitting. Employees are calling in sick or on disability in significant numbers. Consequently, staff who do show up are being held over regularly and without recourse and ability to prepare for extended shift work. Staff on duty are also experiencing burn-out and exhaustion; they are overworked and stretched too thin within their units, causing delayed and no responses to emergency calls for help. The youth are increasingly violent and emboldened to challenge staff. Based on statements from DSO Letcher and information from other sources, staff feels they do not have the tools or training and support from superiors for the work and challenges they face.

My recommendations are that staffing from Los Padrinos or elsewhere be sent to Barry J. Nidorf to mitigate the chronic shortages of staff. The increase in population from the transfer of 77 minors

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from the closing facility has caused serious problems and safety issues. It begs the question as to why personnel from Los Padrinios did not move with the minors to Nidorf...

In addition, I recommend a new round of in-service training on use of force and de-escalation be fast tracked for the facility to clarify protocols for controlling aggressive youth.

I also suggest enhancing peer support programs so personnel have improved methods to seek care and support for negative conditions associated with chronic extension of shifts and forced overtime such as loss of daily meals, personal needs and rest.

I expect the Department will pursue prosecution for all incidents of violence within the facility. Those who commit assaults and vandalism must be held accountable for their crimes. It would seem there is some truth to the complaint about the lack of monitoring and supervision of those youth in Units N and O. The damage is extensive and seems to show the vandalism in common areas took place during times when oversight was lax.

I recognize the Department has released the "Barry J. Nidorf Strategic Implementation Plan" to the Probation Commission at today's hearing and some of my recommendations are listed there. It is my belief that conditions at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall must be resolved as soon as possible for the sake of the safety and the welfare of all who reside and work at the facility.

Sincerely,

Joe Gardner, President, Los Angeles County Probation Commission

cc: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Katherine Barger
Sheila E. Mitchell, Chief Deputy
Probation Commission

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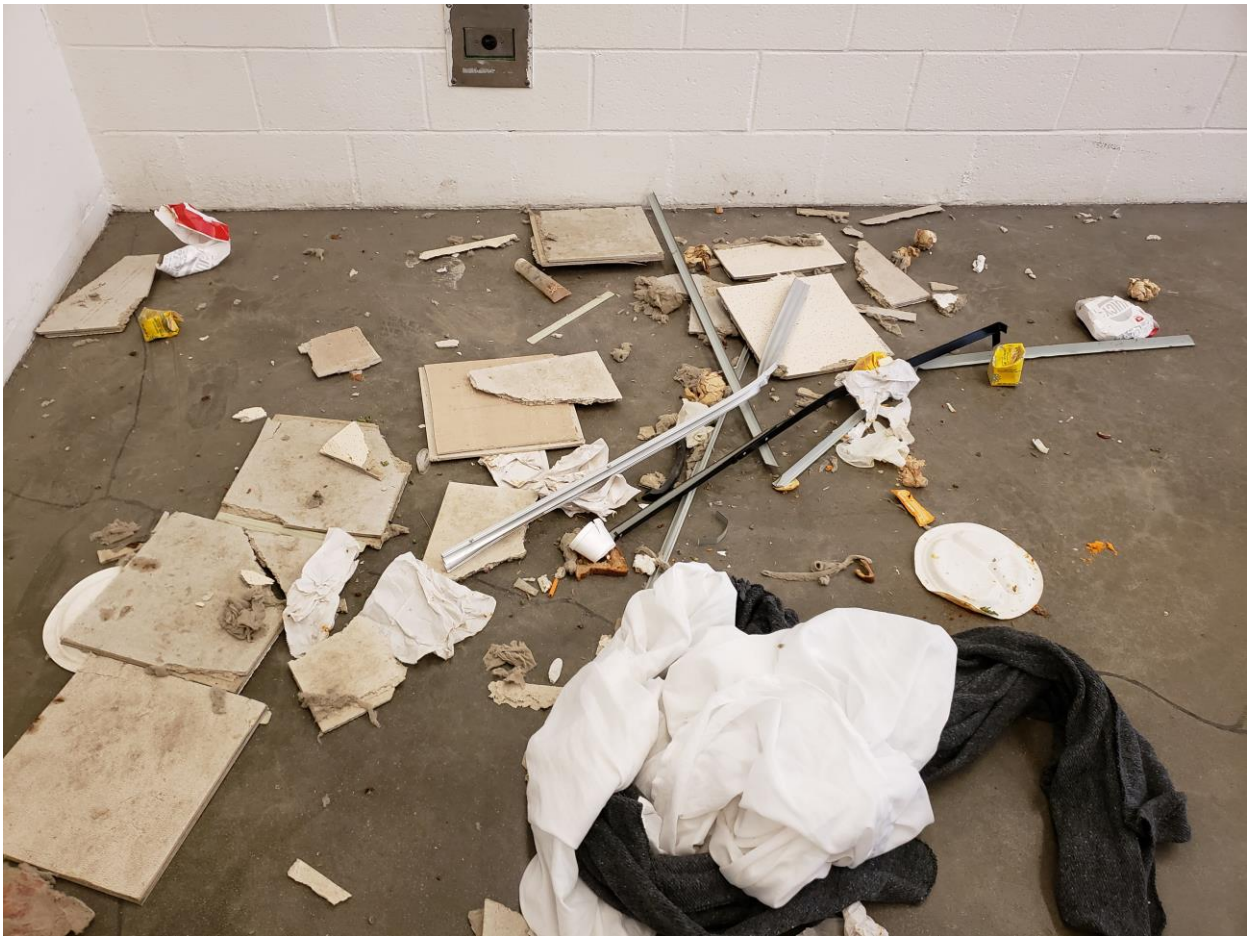
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