



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES PROBATION COMMISSION
9150 EAST IMPERIAL HIGHWAY, DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA, 90242
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June 12, 2020

JOE GARDNER
PRESIDENT

To: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Hilda Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Janice Hahn

CC: Interim Chief Probation Officer Ray Leyva
Taylor Schooley on behalf of the Youth Justice Work Group

From: Joe Gardner
Probation Commission President

PROPOSAL FOR A FACILITY DEDICATED TO REHABILITATION AND MENTAL HEALTH WITHIN THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT SERVICES BUREAU.

Over a period of many months, the members of the Probation Commission have received testimony, information and first-hand accounts of violence, aggressive behavior, and manifestations of various degrees of trauma and mental illness by minors in our camps and juvenile halls. Information includes attacks and lewd conduct by youths against other minors, teaching staff and employees of the Department.

Some minors within camps and halls have been defined as having "high needs", a general term used to identify youth as having behavioral challenges. Leadership at the Department is keenly aware of these needs and have told us that they are working to decrease gang-related violence and other forms of aggression, many of which result from the general instability created when youth perceive the lack of effective control. We have repeatedly recommended to members of the Department to make efforts to address the problems associated with high needs and traumatized youth. We have advised leadership staff to introduce training and resources for line personnel to de-escalate episodes of aggression. Those efforts have been insufficient at best. Not surprisingly, serious incidents continue to take place, putting everyone - staff and youth - in unsafe conditions.

The Department's primary mission is to supervise and provide security for those under its care. It does so at the direction of the courts and according to state mandates. The Department has struggled to fulfill its mission, as neither staff nor youth feel secure in facilities. Unfortunately,

Commissioners

Joe Gardner-President, Hon. Jan Levine (Ret)-1st Vice President, Hon. Betsy Butler (Ret.), 2nd Vice President,
Donald Meredith-Sergeant at Arms, Daniel Seaver, Azael Martinez-Sonoqui, Cyn Yamashiro, Esq., Jacqueline Caster, Esq.
Jo Kaplan, Esq. Olivia E. Mitchell, Peter Shutan, Rev. Zachary Hoover, Randy Herbon, Gale Swartz

"In pursuit of reforms and accountability for better outcomes through oversight, transparency and community engagement."

working with youth who have serious mental health issues remains outside expertise of Probation Department staff. Many members of the Probation Commission believe that minors with acute mental health issues cannot receive the treatment they require while detained in Department detention facilities. The Probation Department has minimal resources, including staffing.

Line staff lost elements of control within the facilities including use of the Special Housing Unit and pepper spray. Rollouts of department-wide, in-service training regarding the use of de-escalation techniques have not been consistent due to chronic personnel shortages. Officers are afraid to come to work; call outs remain high; Absences due to injury and accidents and Family Medical Leave have soared. Unfortunately, that just exacerbates the situation -- without adequate staffing, those who do show up for work are often held over. They become exhausted and burned out. Moreover, there is not enough extra staff to cover absences so staff can participate in training programs. Some staff are mostly untrained in more positive control techniques and are at a loss to prevent and control fights and assaults.

Additionally, Probation Commission inquiries reveal a lack of formal reporting of incidents, criminal filings, and basic protections for victims of assaults. Perceptions by Probation Department staff and education staff are that minors who commit additional crimes while in custody are not being held accountable for their actions.

One thing is clear: There is a critical need to establish a dedicated mental health facility operated by mental health professionals with peripheral security provided by the Probation Department.

We have spoken and heard of the need for early intervention when it comes to our young people. The approach of this resource must be comprehensive so those identified as having mental health and trauma-induced behavioral issues are able to work through those issues to lessen incidents of violence while in custody and beyond. The end goal must be to deter recidivism.

A dedicated mental health treatment facility would include:

- the implementation of treatment programs starting with a thorough initial assessment during the juvenile camp placement process
- a full battery of treatment and medication (if necessary)
- case work with a goal of exit planning to assure stability
- on-going treatment and aftercare upon release.
- Formal reporting of all crimes committed by minors in custody to provide courts opportunities to evaluate and track progress and direct resources and treatment, as necessary.

Formal protocols must be implemented that include treatment models that have proven successful with this population in other jurisdictions.

The Probation Department must affirm its mission to provide every person under its care the opportunities to gain the educational, vocational, and life skills necessary to become productive members of society. For many of our youth, camps and juvenile halls are the last stop before adulthood. We therefore have a responsibility to provide the best, most rehabilitative services we can for those in our care. Assurances must be made for safety of staff and other minors in our institutions and we must work to restore accountability immediately.

The appointed members of the Los Angeles County Probation Commission remain strong advocates for the positive and effective care and treatment for our youth in custody. We urge you to consider this important recommendation.

A roll call vote was taken. Those Commissioners present cast their votes as follows:

Commissioner Azael Martinez-Sonoqui	Yes
Commissioner Cyn Yamashiro	Yes
Commissioner Dan Seaver	Yes
Commissioner Don Meredith	Abstain
Commissioner Elizabeth Butler	Yes
Commissioner Jan Levine	Yes
Commissioner Joe Gardner	Yes
Commissioner Peter Shutan	Yes
Commissioner Randy Herbon	Yes
Commissioner Jacqueline Caster	Absent-excused
Commissioner Jo Kaplan	Absent-excused
Commissioner Olivia Mitchell	Absent-excused

THIS LETTER WAS APPROVED BY MAJORITY ON THIS 11th DAY OF JUNE 2020



Joe Gardner
President, Los Angeles County Probation Commission

Date signed June 11, 2020