

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Maintaining the Decreased Population of Incarcerated Youth in Los Angeles County

The COVID-19 crisis is unprecedented and has required an unprecedented response to protect Los Angeles County residents and ameliorate what they are enduring. In the context of the Probation Department’s youth detention facilities, the Probation Department, in collaboration with the Courts, the Public Defender’s Office, Alternate Public Defender’s Office, and other defense counsel, the District Attorney’s Office, and health agencies, has worked throughout the past three months to release youth from the juvenile halls and camps in recognition that it is safer for all. In that time, the number of young people detained in the juvenile halls has decreased by nearly 200 youth to approximately 355 young people, and similarly, the population of youth in the camps decreased by approximately 90 young people to approximately 200 youth. Highlighting and reanimating questions about whether these youth should have been detained, at all, and how many more youth can be served in the community rather than detained, with a true commitment to creative solutions and a “care-first” approach.

These efforts undertaken to so swiftly reduce the number of youth detained in Probation facilities has only underscored the rationales for the initiatives that the County

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has undertaken over the past several years, to reduce incarceration of young people, and then fundamentally transform how we think about youth and justice in Los Angeles County. The response to COVID-19 accelerated these existing initiatives. This notable decrease comes on the heels of focused efforts by the Probation Department in collaboration with justice partners and community leaders over the past several years, to systematically reduce the number of youth detained in its facilities recognizing that young people are best served in the least restrictive setting with supportive, trauma-informed, community-based services. Even prior to the pandemic then, reform efforts have resulted in dramatic declines over the years – by approximately 30% in the number of youth detained in the juvenile halls from over 900 to under 600 since 2013, and a remarkable 70% decrease in the number of youth detained in the Probation camps from nearly 1,000 to under 300 over the same time – all accompanied by the closure of six Probation camp facilities and one juvenile hall, and an overall decrease in crime.

Furthermore, this Board has undertaken several efforts to transform the Probation Department and the County's approach to youth and juvenile justice. These include the creation of the Youth Diversion and Development Office in 2018, the development and adoption of recommendations from the Probation Reform Implementation Team put forth in August of 2019, and the concurrent creation of the Youth Justice Workgroup led by the Youth Development and Diversion Office with the Chief Executive Office with participation from justice system partners and community stakeholders to develop a plan for taking young people out of the Probation Department, restructuring the juvenile justice system, and shifting away from a punitive paradigm towards a meaningfully different rehabilitative, health-focused and care-first system, that further reduces the County's reliance on incarceration.

At the state level, Governor Newsom has taken similar steps. Last year, he announced his intention to move the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) out of the California Department of Corrections into the Department of Health and Human Services. In May 2020, the Governor announced that the state's DJJ facilities would be closed by 2021, in light of the extraordinary economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of efforts to keep young people who would have been sent to DJJ in their home county, to access services and maintain closer connections with family, community, and services. These proposals constitute transformative steps in the right direction, but also mean that the future iteration of the juvenile justice system in Los Angeles County will inherit responsibility and care over potentially hundreds of young people who might have otherwise been sent to DJJ facilities over the next few years. The Youth Justice Workgroup has recently been directed to take up the project of aligning the County's response to the DJJ closure with the goals for which it was originally constituted.

The County and the state have made impressive progress towards realizing the vision for transformation of our youth justice systems into health-based, trauma-informed, restorative models in a considerably small amount of time. While the economic landscape facing the county, state, and country, is daunting, this should in no way lead to delays in the progress towards the ultimate vision of transformation that we have invested so much into building. In fact, these economic challenges present opportunities for both improving health, safety, and equity for youth and communities and realizing cost savings, including by maintaining the decreases in detained youth populations and avoiding the reopening of closed facilities.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Probation Department and the Youth Development and Diversion Office, in consultation with the Public Defender's Office, the Alternate Public Defender's Office, the Independent Juvenile Defender's Office, the District Attorney's office, the Courts, the Chief Executive Office, County Counsel, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health Services, Department of Public Health, and community stakeholders to report back in 30 days with a plan for maintaining the reductions – and where possible continuing to reduce – populations of youth in the juvenile camps and halls at or below the levels reached during this pandemic to avoid returning to the higher incarceration numbers and rates at which youth were detained prior to March 2020, including recommendations for
 - a. Supporting and expanding community-based alternatives to detention services and placement options, including the reallocation of existing resources in order to prioritize such alternatives;
 - b. Legislative and local policy changes to support this goal;
 - c. Evaluating outcomes for youth released since March 2020, and those diverted or otherwise released early from detention facilities, going forward.
2. Direct the Auditor-Controller, in consultation with the Probation Department, Chief Executive Office, and other relevant stakeholders, to report back with an analysis of its current and projected juvenile institutions revenue and expenditures, staffing numbers, including vacancies and ratios in juvenile institutions, and costs savings realized related to the decrease in populations since the declaration of the State of Emergency of the County, and potential cost savings related to maintaining similar population levels, going forward.

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