

Los Angeles County DJJ Transition Team

February 26, 2021

Towards Transformation: Los Angeles County, CA

AGN NO. _____

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS AND
SHEILA KUEHL

August 13, 2019

Restructuring the Juvenile Justice System: Building a Health-Focused Model

Well-regarded research on adolescent brain development, positive youth development and trauma have demonstrated the ways youth are physiologically and fundamentally different from adults and require different interventions. Acknowledgement of these differences has resulted in the understanding that punitive models of juvenile justice not only result in worsened outcomes, which runs counter to the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system, but also fail to make communities safer. Systems centered on healing and growth are essential for improving the well-being of young people.

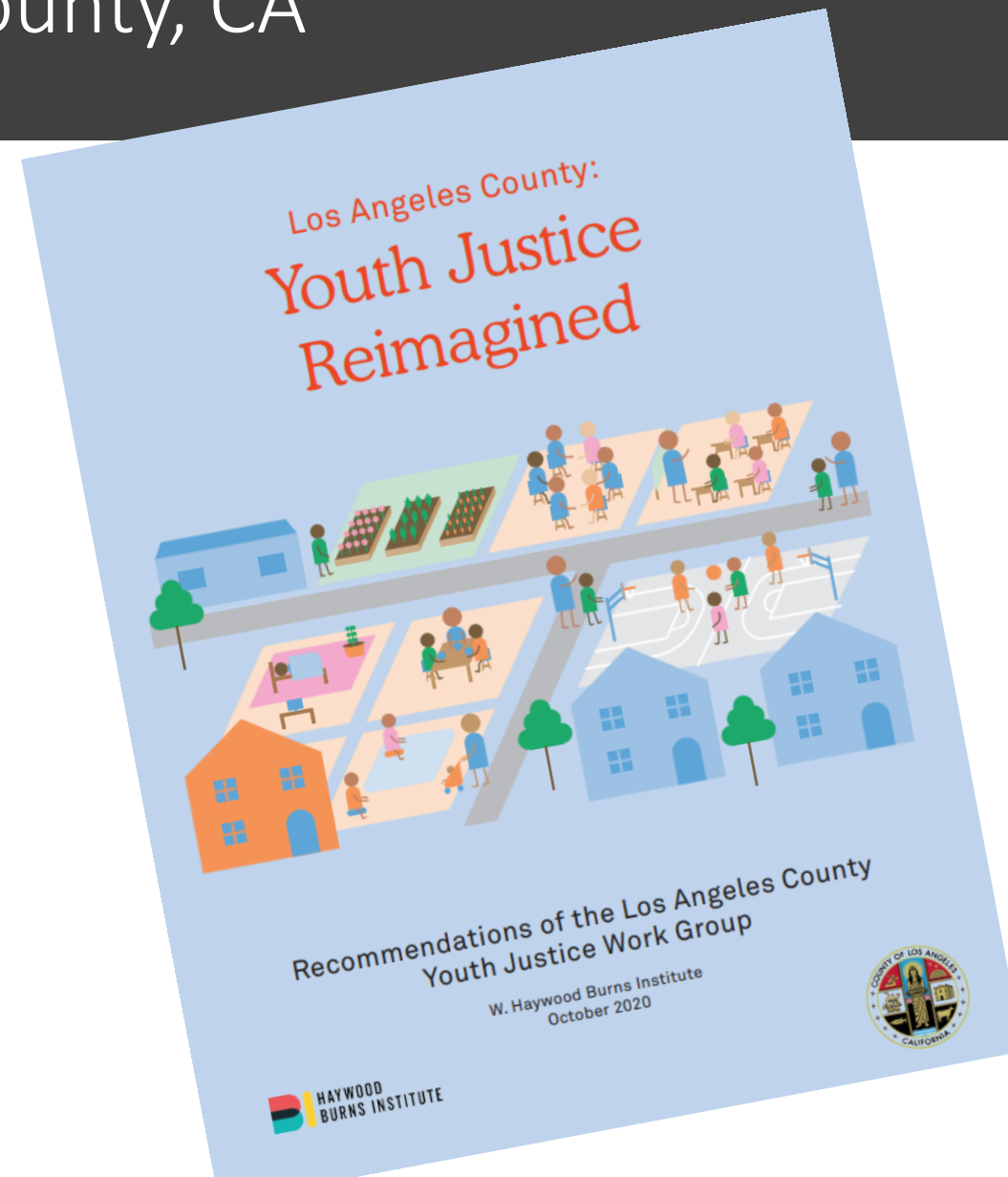
Over the past decade, many counties have attempted to reform what had become, at their core, overly punitive juvenile justice systems; Los Angeles County (County) is among them. While local reform efforts have resulted in some improvements, including reductions in incarceration, fewer low-risk youth on probation, and greater investments in diversion, the County has so far struggled to achieve major improvements in the treatment of youth in its care and custody. This year, rampant use of pepper spray has put into question youth safety, and the significant mental health needs of youth – 90% of youth in the juvenile halls have an open mental health case – puts into question whether a system of incarceration is even appropriate. If the County is to meet its obligation of adequately addressing the rehabilitative needs of the youth in its care, it must acknowledge that the juvenile camps and halls model is fundamentally flawed, and that housing supervision and services within an agency with a law enforcement orientation may be counterproductive. Shifting towards a rehabilitative, care-first

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“Explore the transitioning of the Los Angeles County’s juvenile justice system out of the Probation Department into another agency, with the goal of creating a rehabilitative, health-focused, and care-first system [that is] meaningfully different in operations and outcomes from the current system.”

– Motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl, August 13, 2019



May 26, 2020: LA County BOS Motion on DJJ Transition

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
AND SHEILA KUEHL

AGN. NO
May 26, 2020

Preparing Los Angeles County for the Closure of the State's Division of Juvenile Justice

On May 14, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom announced, as part of the revised budget, that the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) will be closing. Starting January 1, 2021, DJJ will no longer admit new youth and these youth would instead be housed at the county level. Over time, the three DJJ facilities will close. It is unclear whether any youth currently held at DJJ, or transferred there before January 2021, will be transferred to counties as well. It is also unclear whether courts and prosecutors will start to adjust their current practices, including those related to charging, plea-dealing and petitions for transfer, ahead of January 2021. As explained in the Governor's revised budget, this move is intended to help close a historic budget deficit created by the COVID-19 crisis, as well as to ultimately "enable youth to remain in their communities and stay close to their families to support rehabilitation."

While this change is sudden, last year Governor Newsom took steps to shift away from a punitive state system by moving DJJ into a separate department under the State's Health and Human Services Agency. This action was intended to bring about a cultural change to create opportunities to enhance educational, mental health and social service

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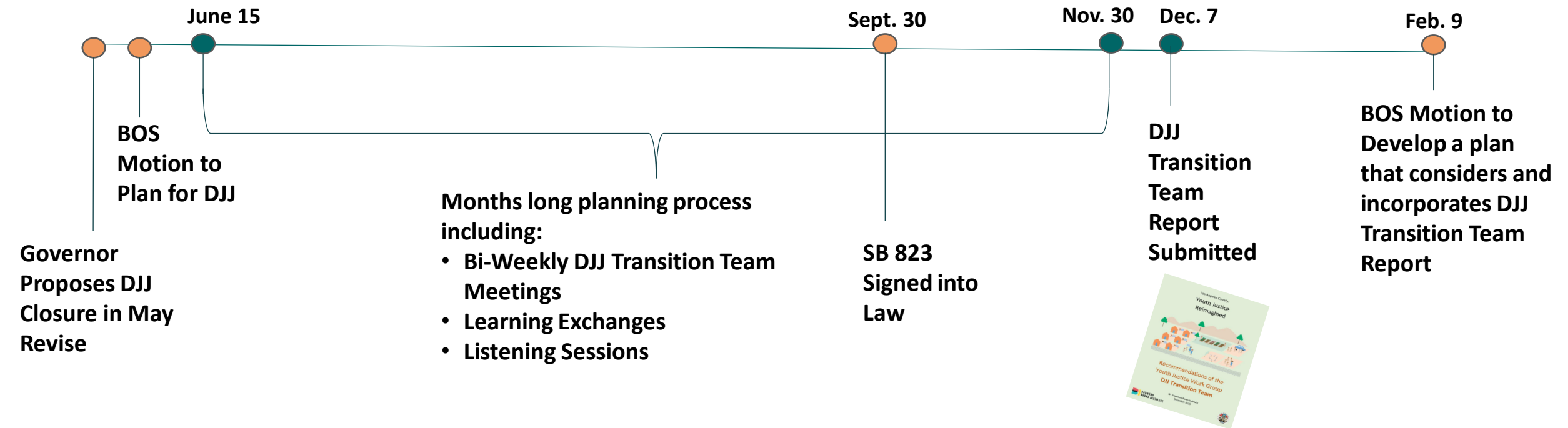
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- a. An **analysis** of how the new DJJ population may be incorporated into the model and plan under development by the Youth Justice Work Group for all justice-involved youth in the County, including youth committed to DJJ who are currently held in the County due to the DJJ's COVID-19 related moratorium on new admissions;
- b. Strategies to **prevent more youth from being tried as adults** under the new system;
- c. Strategies to **increase community-based alternatives** to detention options for youth who would have previously been sent to DJJ;
- d. The **status and capacity of the County's current juvenile facilities** to adequately serve the needs of DJJ-committed youth justice populations, reserving any consideration of re-opening closed facilities, only as a last resort;
- e. **Preventing punitive practices** that were previously eliminated or are being phased out from being reinstated;
- f. **Ensuring robust oversight** of the treatment of this new population, as well as the DJJ re-entry population that is currently being supervised by the County; and
- g. **Any budgetary, legal or legislative implications** or changes needed to create the best system possible, including the potential of raising the age of jurisdiction in the County's juvenile justice system to align with DJJ's age limit, and ensuring the County receives sufficient funding from the State to fund the rehabilitative programs and services needed to serve this population.



DJJ Transition Team Timeline

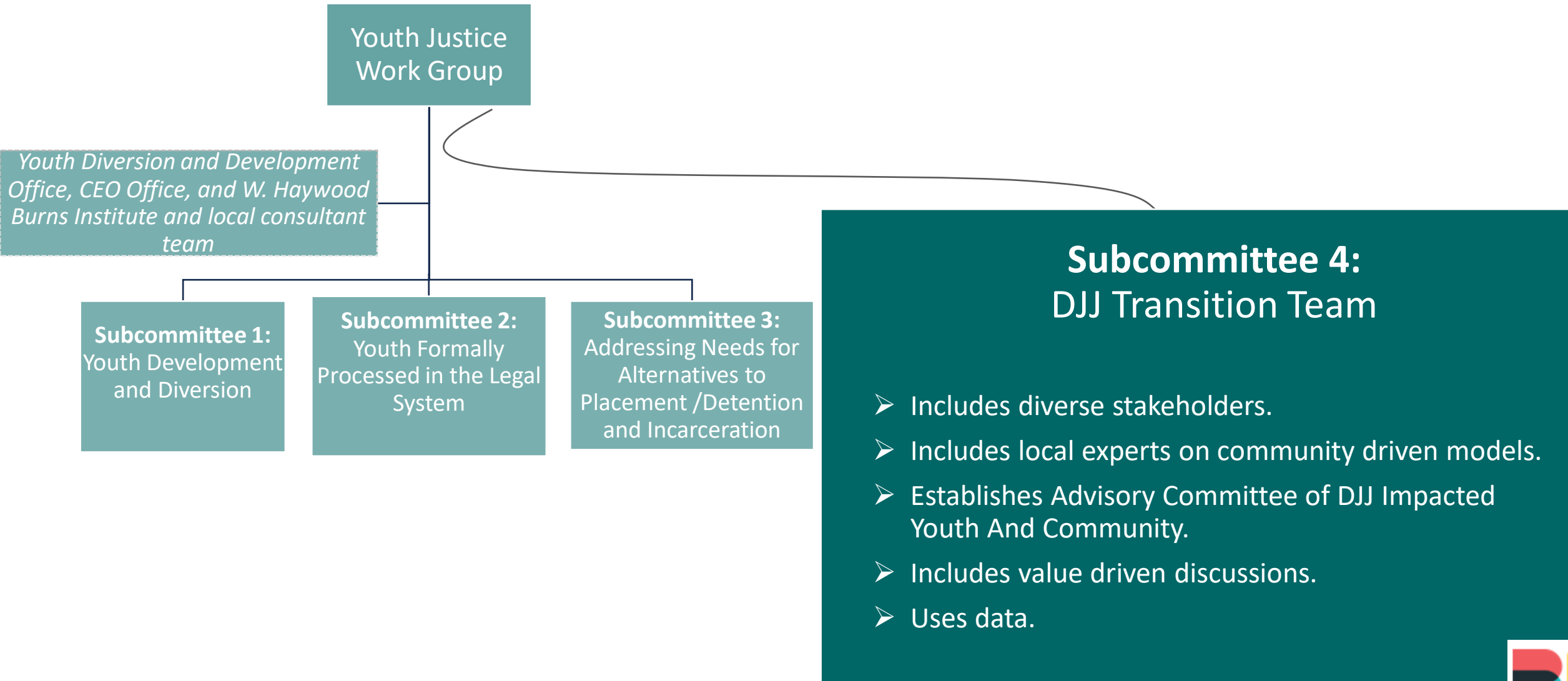


DJJ Transition Team Participants

- Probation
- Defense Counsel
- District Attorney
- Justice System Impacted Youth
- Service Providers
- Mental Health
- County Office of Education
- Judge
- Community based organizations
- Community Leaders
- Crime Survivor Advocates
- County Counsel
- Chief Executive Office
- Youth Development and Diversion



DJJ Transition Team



DJJ Youth Advisory Board Perspective

Perspective on Failures of DJJ:

1. **Large size.**
2. **Unsupportive staff and staff culture.**
3. **Lack of mentorship inside.**
4. **Dehumanizing procedures.**
5. **Programming that doesn't work**
6. **Disconnection and distance.**
7. **Lack of trust.**
8. **Lack of hope and opportunity.**
9. **Lack of safety and violence.**
10. **Lack of fairness in accountability.**
11. **Lack of consistency.**

Perspective on Ideal Components for a DJJ Alternative

1. **Supportive, relatable staff**, especially those with lived experience similar to the youth
2. **Campus-like environment** with teachers, counselors, mentors on site throughout the weekdays
3. **Education, skills and vocational programs, opportunities and equipment** (books, laptops, internet, etc.) that expose youth to new learning and ways of thinking
4. **Fair rules applied to all youth** that avoid favoritism
5. **Access to community and relationship-building** off-site and through CBOs
6. **A positive incentive-based system**, especially the opportunity to step-down from more restrictive to less restrictive housing.
7. **Dignity and privacy.** For instance, bedrooms that have basic amenities like a good bed and allow for some privacy and individuality.
8. **Security through a sense of safety.** While programming, youth feel safe with their peers and staff; there is security overall in the environment.



Rooting Work in Core Values

1. Youth should be addressed through a holistic, trauma-informed approach. Responses to youth should focus on rehabilitation, healing, enhancing public safety and restorative justice.
2. Youth's family and community should be active participants in their healing.
3. Any form of out-of-home placement should promote healing in a therapeutic environment. Youth should not be warehoused in punitive, institutionalized settings.
4. Comprehensive educational and vocational opportunities should be provided.
5. Voices of victims and survivors should be heard, and perspectives considered.
6. Facility staffing should prioritize backgrounds in social work, healing, restorative and transformative justice.
7. Justice system should make intentional investment in CBOs rooted in directly impacted neighborhoods to provide support services for youth in and out of custody.
8. Reentry support with connection to the community is critical and should begin right away.
9. A model focused on punishment and retribution will undermine the progress achieved thus far in LA County.



Facility Attributes

Facility	Facility Attributes					Other Considerations		
	“Security”	Capacity for Vocational and Educational Training	Therapeutic Environment	Not Prison-like	Vast, Outdoor, green spaces	Benefits as DJJ Alt.	Concerns for use as DJJ Alt.	Renovations needed to align facility with core values
The Compound (Barry J. Nidorf)								
Traditional “Camps”								
Dorothy Kirby								
Campus Kilpatrick								
Gonzales								
STRTP								
New Small Home-like Model- (ARC)								

For each facility, the DJJ Transition Team discussed how the facility attributes aligned or deviated from core values. The DJJ Transition Team concluded that:

- Facility at “The Compound” at Barry J Nidorf were fundamentally in contrast with the core values.*
- The facilities with the most promise included Campus Kilpatrick, Camp Gonzales and Dorothy Kirby.*

* Programming and Staffing for each facility assessed separately.



Summary of Recommendations

1. Plan to phase the transition of probation operations of Secure Alternatives to DJJ to DYD
2. Establish and fund a DJJ Youth Advisory Body
3. Create a JJCC Subcommittee to immediately follow up on recommendations included in this report,
4. Develop a plan for immediate repurposing of Campus Kilpatrick
5. Direct Probation to immediately conduct a safety and security assessment of any facility or pod under consideration
6. Continue efforts to reduce the number of youth committed to camp
7. Ensure initial staffing of Secure Alternatives to DJJ prioritizes backgrounds in social work, cultural healing, and youth development practices, and an initial cohort of Credible Messengers are hired and trained to work at Secure Alternatives to DJJ.
8. Develop a policy around dispositional decision-making
9. Direct Probation, YDD and the YJTAG to develop a plan for augmenting existing therapeutic programming
10. Establish a practice of regular collection and reporting of key data

Los Angeles County:

Youth Justice Reimagined



Recommendations of the Youth Justice Work Group DJJ Transition Team

W. Haywood Burns Institute
December 2020

