



PREVENTING VIOLENCE
AND DEVELOPING
YOUTH LEADERS

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September 18, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

HONORARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL

HON. DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator

EDWARD JAMES OLMOS
Actor

HON. BARBARA LEE
United States Representative

Re: Request for Signature - SB 284: Keep Youth Closer to Home Act (Beall)

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Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of Youth ALIVE! and our constituency of youth and families personally impacted by violence, I write to express support for SB 284, the Keep Youth Closer to Home Act (Beall), which will spur local innovation and reduce county incentives to send youth to the troubled state youth correctional system, the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), by increasing the fee counties pay for youth committed to the state.

Youth ALIVE! is a national leader in addressing violence and Oakland's anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention and healing. We work directly with victims of shootings and with the formerly incarcerated to create paths to peace and healing, and we train young leaders to create change. We support SB 284 because sending our youth to DJJ hurts our communities and does not make us safer.

DJJ is costly, dangerous, and inherently ineffective at rehabilitating youth. The facilities' harsh, prison-like conditions exacerbate underlying needs and expose youth to the trauma of family separation. Deficiencies in the DJJ model are apparent in the institution's high rate of recidivism: 74 percent of youth are rearrested within three years of release, 54 percent are reconvicted for a new offense, and 37 percent return to a state institution.

However, nearly every California county has its own secure, probation-run facility for youth, such as a camp, ranch, or juvenile hall. These local facilities are operating at less than one-third capacity and many have abundant treatment space for high-needs youth. Local alternatives to DJJ better align with best practices for effective rehabilitation, recommending that youth be held in small, close-to-home facilities to allow for a smooth transition back into their communities.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANNE C. MARKS
Executive Director
Youth ALIVE!
Oakland, CA



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Yet counties currently face a steep financial incentive to commit youth to DJJ, even when local placement or services would better address their needs. Counties pay a flat rate of \$24,000 per year for youth committed to DJJ. This is just a fraction of the state's average cost of confining a youth at DJJ, which exceeds \$300,000 annually, and is far less costly than most local alternatives to DJJ. The result is extreme disparities in county rates of commitment to DJJ, with some counties relying heavily on DJJ given its low cost, while others opt for local treatment and services, but must continue to subsidize DJJ through state tax dollars.

This bill aims to reduce reliance on DJJ and boost local innovation in all counties by creating an incentive to keep youth closer to home. SB 284 establishes a two-tiered county fee that increases the annual cost of sending a youth to DJJ from \$24,000 to \$125,000 for most youth committed to DJJ by a juvenile court and maintains a fee of \$24,000 for youth most at risk of transfer to adult court. The bill would not prohibit counties from committing youth to DJJ, nor would it interfere with judges' authority to place youth in the most suitable treatment setting. Rather, it aims to establish greater parity between the fee for committing a youth to DJJ and the cost of serving them in an alternative to state confinement.

SB 284 presents California with an important opportunity to promote best practices for effective rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and minimize county reliance on the harmful DJJ institutions by creating an incentive for retaining youth closer to home.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your signature on SB 284.

Sincerely,

Anne Marks
Executive Director