



PREVENTING VIOLENCE  
AND DEVELOPING  
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH ALIVE!  
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September 18, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
1303 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**HONORARY  
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

HON. DIANNE FEINSTEIN  
United States Senator

EDWARD JAMES OLMOS  
Actor

HON. BARBARA LEE  
United States Representative

**Re: Request for Signature - Senate Bill 394 (Skinner)**

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of Youth ALIVE!, Oakland's anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention and healing, I write in support of Senate Bill 394 (Skinner), which will allow courts to assign pre-trial diversion for primary caregivers charged with low-level offenses. This would create opportunities for parents to stay closer to their children and provide an alternative to incarceration pending judicial discretion.

Youth ALIVE! is a nationally recognized community-based organization known for initiating an alliance to treat violence as a public health crisis and developing young leaders in the process. Youth ALIVE! has been invested in serving Oakland communities historically plagued by gun violence. Tasked as one of Oakland's primary anchors in serving victims of violent crime, Youth ALIVE! has maintained a successful track record of implementing evidence-based violence intervention and prevention services. We support SB 394 because ending cycles of trauma is a top priority for reducing violence in our communities.

Parental incarceration is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that leads to toxic stress for children, and as more than 50 ACEs studies show, has dire consequences for children as they age. When a parent goes to jail or prison, it sets into action a host of harmful near-term and lifelong effects for their children. Children who have parents who are incarcerated have higher rates of physical health problems and mental health conditions, such as depression, self-esteem issues, substance use disorders, and emotional withdrawal. Setting them on a lifelong trajectory, kids with incarcerated parents drop out of school more, have lower test scores, and are often placed in foster care, which comes with a host of poor outcomes. Of great concern is that when a parent is extracted from their lives, children are more likely to be sexually trafficked, become homeless, have lower incomes – all of which could lead to incarceration themselves.

Additionally, the types of programs and sentencing options that could be considered as alternatives to incarceration not only work but actually have better outcomes than prison or jail. Alternatives like drug and alcohol treatment, education, vocational training and job placement, parenting classes, and safe housing show lower recidivism rates than incarceration. Studies show that parents who are convicted but able to remain with or near their children have reduced substance use, higher completion rates for their program, improved parenting skills, and foster healthier child development. Furthermore, these programs are cost effective.

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Community safety is crucial to public health, but incarcerating primary caregivers of children leads to future safety issues. It is time for California to join other states in decreasing incarceration of people who are primary caregivers of children. By using alternative sentencing, California can create safe, stable, and nurturing environment for children and families. Parents who have committed crimes often do so because of harms they have experienced, or lack of access to opportunity. Getting parents the services, support, and treatment to enable them to care for their children will mean safer communities for us all.

For these reasons, Youth ALIVE! urges your signature on Senate Bill 394 (Skinner).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Marks", is written over a horizontal line.

Anne Marks  
Executive Director