



PREVENTING VIOLENCE
AND DEVELOPING
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH ALIVE!
3300 Elm Street
Oakland, CA 94609
Tel: (510) 594-2588
Fax: (510) 594-0667
mail@youthalive.org
www.youthalive.org

March 17, 2021

Assemblymember Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer Sr.
Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee
Legislative Office Building
1020 N Street, Room 11
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 503 (Stone) - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Jones-Sawyer,

Youth ALIVE! is proud to support AB 503, which will place limits on the time young people spend on probation and ensure terms of probation are limited, developmentally appropriate, and individually tailored to the young person. AB 503 ensures that young people who are on probation are provided with opportunities for success, rather than being placed under extensive probation terms that make recidivism more likely.

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. Tasked as Oakland’s anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention, and healing, Youth ALIVE! has maintained a successful track record of implementing evidence-based violence intervention and prevention services. Our decades of experience serving community members impacted by juvenile justice systems informs our support of Assembly Bill 503.

Probation is the most common disposition imposed on youth in juvenile court in California. In 2019, over 19,000 young Californians were placed on wardship probation. While probation departments intend to provide rehabilitative services to young people, this function is undermined by its simultaneous focus on surveillance and compliance. Research has concluded that “[i]n most jurisdictions, probation is a punitive system that attempts to elicit compliance from individuals primarily through the imposition of conditions, fines, and fees that in many cases cannot be met.”¹

Importantly, youth of color are disparately impacted by justice system involvement and probation supervision—the vast majority (87%) of young people in California placed on probation in 2019 were youth of color. According to data from the California Department of Justice (DOJ), youth of color are significantly more likely

¹ Michael P. Jacobson et al., “Less Is More: How Reducing Probation Populations Can Improve Outcomes,” Papers from the Executive Session on Community Corrections, Harvard Kennedy School, (2017), p. 1.

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Oakland, CA



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to go through court proceedings and be placed on formal probation. In 2019, Black youth were over eight times more likely than White youth to be placed on probation and Latino youth were more than two times more likely.²

In contrast to a growing number of states, California has no statutory limitation on the length of time young people spend under court ordered, non-custodial “wardship” probation supervision—something that was recently changed in the California adult courts with AB 1950 (2020). Analysis of county probation data reveal that young people are on wardship probation for an average of up to two years,³ with youth of color spending significantly longer periods of time on probation than White youth.⁴

Long probation terms increase the likelihood that youth will be charged with probation violations, sometimes resulting in incarceration, and often for minor noncriminal transgressions. This practice is in conflict with the principles of youth development and research demonstrating that keeping youth on supervision for longer than six months likely does not result in public safety gains.⁵ Guided by this research, juvenile justice experts in the Pew Charitable Trusts’ Public Safety Performance Project have recommended shorter periods of probation for youth in several states.⁶

Further, probation conditions all too often set youth up for failure. Research shows that youth often do not understand what is expected of them even right after they leave the courtroom at the time of disposition. The imposition of long lists of requirements, many of which bear little or no relationship to the behavior that brought the youth before the court, make it difficult for youth to succeed. Juvenile court probation orders in California can include anywhere from five to fifty conditions of probation. Standard terms and conditions of probation for youth, regardless of level of need, are not always individually tailored and developmentally appropriate to provide adequate support. Evidence supports limiting probation terms and using the incentive of shortening probation terms as a reward for positive behavior showing that this can improve outcomes and reduce costs without compromising public safety.⁷

² Office of the Attorney General, California Department of Justice (DOJ), “Juvenile Justice in California.” (2019).

³ Resource Development Associates. (2017, August 18). LA probation governance study: LA Probation Department assessment. Retrieved from http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/probation/1029805_LAPGS-Prob-Assess-20170818_STC.pdf

⁴ W. Haywood Burns Institute (2017, August 18). Presentation to Race Equity in Justice Systems Workgroup of Santa Clara County’s Juvenile Justice System’s Collaborative (JJSC). Retrieved from <http://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=8464&Inline=True>

⁵ Joint Ad-Hoc Tennessee Blue Ribbon Task Force on Juvenile Justice. (2017, December). Final report. Retrieved From <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Archives/Joint/reports/docs/Joint%20Ad%20Hoc%20TN%20Blue%20Ribbon%20Task%20Force%20on%20Juvenile%20Justice%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁶ The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2017, June). Kansas’ 2016 juvenile justice reform. Retrieved from www.pewtrusts.org/~media/Assets/2017/06/PSPP_Kansas_2016_Juvenile_Justice_Reform_brief.pdf. For example, in Kansas, the law creates a presumptive limit on the length of probation terms based on youths’ risk levels and offense severity and prohibits extension of the term except for a single, short period under very narrow circumstances

⁷ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2018, May). Transforming Juvenile Justice: A Vision for Getting it Right. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/transforming-juvenile-probation/>.



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Youth are most successful when they know when their probation will end and are not subjected to unreasonable or developmentally inappropriate probation terms. AB 503 will address the problems with California's probation supervision of youth by:

- Creating a presumption that non-custodial wardship probation will be terminated at six months, with the ability to grant extensions to probation supervision if the court determines that there is clear and convincing evidence to extend probation based on the youth's best interest, and
- Requiring probation conditions be individually tailored, developmentally appropriate, and reasonable.

All young people should be treated equitably, have the opportunity to experience a normal childhood, and be supported in their youthful development. For these reasons, Youth ALIVE! is pleased to support AB 503 and respectfully requests your "Aye" vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Marks".

Anne Marks
Executive Director

CC:

Assemblymember Tom Lackey (Vice Chair)
Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan
Assemblymember Sydney Kamlager
Assemblymember Bill Quirk
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago
Assemblymember Kelly Seyarto
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks