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Senator Bradford introduces legislation to re-invest hundreds of millions in health-focused and community-based youth services

SACRAMENTO — Today, Senator Steven Bradford introduced Senate Bill (SB) 493, **The PROMYSE (Promoting Youth Success and Empowerment) Act**. The bill, authored by Senator Bradford and co-authored by Assemblymember Stone, will dramatically improve spending and accountability of an annual state grant called the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA).

For 20 years, California counties have poorly spent hundreds of millions in JJCPA dollars, which are designated to support justice-involved and “at-promise” youth locally, and the state has done little to ensure accountability. In fiscal year 2018–19, counties received nearly \$160 million in JJCPA funding.

“Reforming JJCPA responds to rising calls for racial justice and addresses economic challenges heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill will provide for greater accountability, effectiveness, and equity in supporting our youth,” **says Senator Bradford**. “The PROMYSE Act will ensure state funds are invested in youth development and crime prevention.”

SB 493 will do this by requiring at least 95 percent of JJCPA funds to be invested in non-law enforcement public agencies and/or community-based organizations. Further, it will foster equitable decision-making by restructuring each county’s Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC), which is responsible for overseeing JJCPA grant administration locally. Under SB 493, JJCCs will have fewer mandated government agency representatives and must include at least 50 percent community representation. The bill will also expand reporting by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) and counties to include critical evidence on youth served and program effectiveness to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely.

In May 2020, the California State Auditor released a scathing report on JJCPA administration and spending. According to the state auditor, counties have excluded legally required council representatives, and data reporting has not demonstrated the effectiveness of JJCPA-funded programs. **The California State Auditor found**, “counties made only limited revisions that failed to demonstrate how their strategies for addressing juvenile crime and delinquency had changed over the last 20 years.” During that time, youth arrests dropped by over 80 percent leading to massive declines in youth contact with probation and other law enforcement entities. Yet counties continue to funnel the majority of JJCPA dollars to probation salaries and benefits with little to no investment in youth services provided by community-based organizations.

“Use of JJCPA funds on law enforcement personnel—including net-widening with excessive supervision—is contradictory to the bill’s original intent of investment in collaborative, community-based services,” **explains original JJCPA co-author, Congressman Tony Cardenas.** “I developed JJCPA in response to California’s harmful history of tough-on-crime measures and its over-incarceration of young people... JJCPA funds were intended to support community-run prevention and intervention programs.”

The PROMYSE Act will revitalize California’s JJCPA grant to align with youths’ needs and present-day realities. **Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) Youth Advocate Kenzo Sohoue expresses,** “I’ve noticed that most of my peers were never exposed to opportunities in their childhoods that could have molded them and encouraged them to become productive members of our communities. That is because there isn’t enough money invested in community centers and youth development centers.”

Black and brown youth have experienced the brunt of California’s punitive system. Better JJCPA investments can ensure that state funds no longer prop up a system that has consistently failed youth and communities of color. It is time to invest in a new vision for California’s young people—one that recognizes that health, education, and community-based services are essential in preventing youths’ exposure to the justice system. SB 493 is a critical step to establish a strong foundation for the future.

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The PROMYSE Act Co-Sponsor Coalition is made up of advocates, service providers, and youth justice experts—including individuals directly impacted by the juvenile justice system—representing a statewide network of constituents that promote the safety and wellness of California’s diverse communities. Our collective expertise is informed by direct experiences with local JJCPA decision-making, participation in JJCPA-funded programs, and research that led to alarming findings of poor JJCPA administration including amassing unspent funds, misuse of funds, and failure to comply with mandated processes.