

# ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE REINVESTMENT HEARING



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Public Testimony

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Good morning to the honorable Chairs and Members of the Assembly Select Committee on Justice Reinvestment. My name is Brian Goldstein and I am a Policy Analyst with the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) in San Francisco. CJCJ is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes balanced criminal and juvenile justice systems through the provision of direct services, technical assistance, and policy analysis. Our agency mission is to reduce society's use of incarceration as a solution to social problems.

California's juvenile justice system is undergoing a remarkable transformation given a parallel decline in youth incarceration and youth crime. In fact, youth crime is at the lowest point since 1959. Moreover, justice-involved youth are overwhelmingly served locally, at a lower cost with better outcomes than the state has historically provided. This changing juvenile justice landscape requires recognition and state support to continue. Given the purpose of this committee, my intent is to highlight three recommendations California can focus on to reinvest these savings in a 21<sup>st</sup> century juvenile justice system.

## **1. Strengthen data collection systems.**

Data creates the foundation of sound policymaking. As a research organization, we believe reliable and accessible data are essential to track how youth move through our justice system and whether systems lead to improved public safety outcomes. The Department of Justice (DOJ) and Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) are the central state agencies for collecting these data. Unfortunately, due to a lack of investment in these departments, accessing these data is often the hardest part of our work. For example, the latest DOJ juvenile data we can access is from 2011. This limits researchers and other parties' ability to conduct essential data analysis that contributes to the decision-making process here in the capitol. It is these departments'

responsibility to provide up to date data and adequate investment is necessary to provide this critical service.

Unfortunately, the DOJ has a cumbersome verification and review process and a lack of resources, which has caused delay in the release of 2012 data. Due to department budget cuts, they have stopped all other publications related to crime data and no longer respond to public requests, which effectively blocks researchers, policymakers, and the public from the critical information related to public safety.

## **2. Elevate innovative community-based models.**

California's patchwork of county juvenile justice systems has created an environment that produces pockets of innovation and stagnation. Two examples of innovation are the William F. James Boys Ranch in Santa Clara County and the former Fouts Springs Youth Facility in Solano County. Both are examples of local programs that result in long-term stability for high-risk youth and better family reunification. Both facilities achieve this, at a lower cost, than the state Division of Juvenile Facilities (DJF). The average daily cost of housing youths in Fouts Springs was approximately \$191.94. In comparison, DJF's estimated annual cost per youth for FY 2013-14 is \$270,000, which is about \$739.72 per day. The state has a unique responsibility to strengthen and incentivize those innovative programs through sustained funding and technical assistance.

Unfortunately, counties do not necessarily have the capacity to incorporate deep end data analysis. Despite Solano County Probation Department's willingness to share data and implement data-driven decisions, they faced challenges with their outdated information management systems. This resulted in a cumbersome process that required extensive staff-time for them to extract the relevant information, let alone to determine youth outcomes.

## **3. Integrate model approaches into juvenile justice funding allocations.**

California annually allocates millions to counties for a wide array of juvenile justice programs. The state funds approximately \$90 million annually through the Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG). Yet, the BSCC struggles to consider youth outcomes in the allocation process. In their most recent YOBG

report, the BSCC acknowledges, “The nature of the data collected precludes our ability to draw inferences about cause and effect relationships between services and outcomes.” In addition, a 2012 State Auditor’s report calls for greater state oversight of YOBG, given their potentially valuable impact.

Moreover, the BSCC stands poised to allocate approximately \$80 million for a second round of SB 81 county juvenile facility construction funds this year. This is an opportunity for the state to incorporate model facility design and programming into the allocation process.

Whereas \$80 million may not seem like a lot given the entire state correctional budget, this will have long-term implications for the dispositional options available to youth at the county level. We want to make sure the executive steering committee that allocates this money is required to include elements of model community practices, that are strengths-based, family-centered, and trauma-informed. This will be reflective of the direction the state is moving to address the underlying cause of youth crime.

In conclusion, the state stands at a cross roads amid juvenile realignment and the historic drop in youth crime, which is saving state resources. The state must build on this through reinvesting these resources in stronger data systems, existing community-based models, and funding streams that incentivize data-driven decision-making. Thank you.