Print on your organization’s letterhead.

[Date]

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Request for Governor’s signature on SB 284, the Keep Youth Closer to Home Act (Beall)**

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of [Insert your organization’s name], I write to request your signature on 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.

[Include a brief description of your organization]

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.

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.

The Keep Youth Close to Home Act complements your proposal to move DJJ into the Health and Human Services Agency by providing a revenue source to support this innovation and setting California on a path towards “ending youth imprisonment in California as we know it.” At the local level, SB 284 promotes best practices for effective rehabilitation, reduces recidivism, and minimizes reliance on the harmful DJJ institutions by creating an incentive for keeping youth closer to home. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to sign SB 284 into law.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]

[Organization]

cc: Tania Dikho, Office of Senator Jim Beall (tania.dikho@sen.ca.gov)

 Renee Menart, Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (renee@cjcj.org)