

# MEDIA RESOURCE: QUOTABLE CONTENT



Supplement to *Unmet Promises* | February 2019

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice's (CJCJ) report *Unmet Promises: Continued Violence and Neglect in California's Division of Juvenile Justice* recognizes the importance of uplifting the voices of individuals directly impacted by DJJ. The selection of quotes<sup>1</sup> below includes accounts from (1) youth who were confined in DJJ institutions in recent years, (2) family members of DJJ youth, (3) facility staff, (4) the California Office of the Inspector General, and (5) the report authors.

## Youths' lived experiences:

- **"When I came out, I was different.** I couldn't have conversations with people, even with my family. I felt cut off because they isolate you."
- **"I was a kid when I got locked up and I was an adult when I got out.** I had to learn how to drive, get my license, get my ID, do all this stuff. I didn't really have a stable home and I'm on probation and I'm dealing with the adjustment. It was very difficult for me to manage all of that and just to deal with it in a positive way."
- "Do you know how weird it was to be able open my own door when I got home? Imagine going for 5 years being told what to do —when to wake up, when to do anything—to stepping out into society. It was overwhelming, you don't know what to do with that. **I've been secluded in violence, told what to do, been oppressed, scared for my life, just trying to get through the program and now I'm back in society** and having this overwhelming feeling of isolation."
- "There should be signs in the facility when you come in that say 'you're going to go home one day. We're here to release you; we're not here to keep you.' **Staff exercise their power like, 'I can keep you here longer.** You better respect me, you better listen to me.' They should be preparing us for when we get released."
- "I have been dealing with a lot of stress, a lot of anxiety, a lot of pressure from probation. Everyone knows life is hard, and when you have probation on your back and you have this threat of possibly getting locked up and reincarcerated, it is really difficult to deal with. **I have been having mental breakdowns because of the stress and the trauma** of that place [DJJ]."
- I was at a point where I felt like, 'Do I belong here? Am I meant to be here, or in this system, for the rest of my life? That's how bad the environment and the whole situation is. It made kids feel like that. It did not want to make people build their dreams. **It did not rehabilitate me, for sure. If anything it made me worse.**"
- "I didn't have a voice in there so, being out, I often still feel like that. **That place made me feel like I didn't have a voice** so when I got out, people would have to tell me, 'You can speak up and you can say something. You can complain about it.' I was so used to me complaining and nothing happening. I was so used to speaking to say something and it just going unnoticed or brushed off at [DJJ]."
- "They would get away with [misconduct] because **it always came down to their word against ours,** and they are definitely going to believe theirs."
- "[When I first got to DJJ], I felt disoriented. I felt misguided, deluded. **I was just like a sheep lost astray.**"

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<sup>1</sup> All interviewees' names and identifying information have been omitted from the report for their protection. Interviews were conducted by the report authors between June and November 2018.

**Contact:** For more information about this topic or to schedule an interview, please contact CJCJ Communications at (415) 621-5661 x. 103 or [cjcjmedia@cjcc.org](mailto:cjcjmedia@cjcc.org). Additionally, requests for facility photos or contact with report interviewees are welcome.

- **“It’s detrimental to live in [the intake unit].** You have to make yourself be known in intake so that when you get to mainline, they’ve heard of you.”
- **“Intake is the most dangerous place in DJJ.** That’s where most of the fights happen because people are from different neighborhoods...That place is known for riots.”
- “In the morning, everyone’s using the restroom, you’ve got 20 guys on the toilet and you’ve got women walking in and out of there. And **that’s so uncomfortable** towards us. I should be able to go to the restroom and do my own thing without having to worry about [being seen].”
- **“The school environment in there is poor.** The way they do school, you can get your diploma like this [snaps fingers] because the homework is so easy in there. It’s baby homework. They’re not teaching them anything. As long as you show up, you get your credits. And that’s not teaching them stuff.”
- “If you weren’t **bleeding or dying**, you wouldn’t get medical attention.”

### **Family and staff members’ lived experiences:**

- “Visitation at [the Ventura facility] is depressing to me. There are five guards; none of them smile. It’s a big room with another 6 or 7 guards inside. They’re sitting by the door waiting for something to happen. I think they’re hoping something will happen.” –Family member of DJJ youth
- “Fights happen during movement and by the door [of the classroom]. In the living unit, youth don’t mix. School is where they see each other. If they have business to do, they will do it at school.” –DJJ Staff
- “Literally the day after Farrell ended, guards were bragging about going back to the good old days.” –DJJ Staff
- “Speaking out [against other staff] is a dishonor and you’ll pay the price.” –DJJ Staff

### **Misconduct allegations sustained by the California Office of the Inspector General**

- “On April 3, 2017, a lieutenant allegedly grabbed a ward’s arm and forced the ward to the ground, breaking the ward’s wrist, and called the ward a derogatory name. Two officers allegedly threatened the ward and dissuaded him from reporting the use of force.”<sup>2</sup>
- “On July 29, 2016, an officer allegedly inappropriately accessed pictures of wards and placed the pictures with inappropriate drawings on an office window visible to other wards. On August 5, 2016, the officer allegedly allowed two wards to forcibly take a third ward to another room and failed to report it.”
- “On May 30, 2017, a sergeant allegedly placed handcuffs too tightly and unreasonably pushed two wards, failed to report the incident, placed the handcuffed wards in vans and failed to supervise them, and failed to complete disciplinary reports for the wards.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Authors’ insights:**

- “Youth in DJJ facilities are exposed to extreme trauma and isolation. The facilities are inherently dangerous, secretive, and not rehabilitative. With frequent violence and use of force by staff, youth live in a climate of fear that causes continued harm when they return home to their communities.” –Renee Menart
- “The Governor’s budget offers an opportunity for the state to reimagine juvenile justice and reduce reliance on these archaic institutions. To ensure that all youth receive trauma-informed care that prepares them to return home healthy and whole, the state must begin phasing out the DJJ facilities and maximizing the substantial capacity already available for youth in local, close-to-home settings.” – Maureen Washburn

<sup>2</sup> Source for 4/3/2017 and 7/29/2016 allegations: Public Records Act Response from the Office of the Inspector General.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [https://www.oig.ca.gov/media/reports/SAR/2018/OIG\\_Semi\\_Annual\\_Report\\_January-June\\_2018.pdf](https://www.oig.ca.gov/media/reports/SAR/2018/OIG_Semi_Annual_Report_January-June_2018.pdf)

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