

11/01/2022

Karen Mitchoff, Chair, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

Diane Burgis, Supervisor

John Gioia, Supervisor

Federal Glover, Supervisor

Candace Andersen, Supervisor

Dear Supervisors:

We are writing to express our extreme frustration and opposition to the proposed closure of the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility (OAYRF) in Byron, commonly known as the “Ranch.” Two years ago, in the wake of the call of Black Lives Matter, to reimagine our youth justice and public safety systems, our community demanded the closure of the county’s Juvenile Hall. This was met with a commitment from District Attorney Diane Becton to close the Hall and celebrated by the county as a move towards racial and social equity for our youth. Now, once again, we are urging the Board of Supervisors to listen and respond to the community’s call to vote NO on the closure of the “Ranch” until a complete Community Pathways plan has been implemented and proven successful. This plan must include staffing, community resources, and wraparound services provided by community-based organizations. The community must be involved before a final decision is made to close the “Ranch” and expand the Hall.

The Chief of Probation's resolution to close down the “Ranch” and expand the Hall comes on the same date as the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice’s formal launch. In doing so, it contradicts the ORESJ's spirit and mission and obstructs the reduction of racial disparities evidenced by the county's systems-impacted youth, where African-American, Native American, and Latino youth are incarcerated at 5, 3, and 1.7 times the rate of white youth, respectively. It is time for the county to DIVEST from incarceration and INVEST in solutions and organizations that serve the community and uphold human dignity. We cannot create spaces of hope and healing within institutions that are inherently punitive and traumatizing.

The Probation Department’s plan to close the “Ranch” and expand the Juvenile Hall has not been a transparent or community-centered process. Probation has not provided sufficient information about the Community Pathways Program, and the proposal to close the “Ranch” appears to be driven exclusively by staffing concerns, with minimal regard for the closure’s impact on the continuum of services available to justice-involved youth in Contra Costa County. The Probation Department must be held accountable for a plan that was created without bringing the key institutional stakeholders together at the decision-making table, including Behavioral Health, the Public Defender’s Office, the District Attorney’s Office, the Juvenile Court, the Juvenile Justice Commission, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, the Racial Justice Oversight Body, the

Reimagining Youth Justice Taskforce, and the Office of Education. Furthermore, Probation staff has not engaged community stakeholders, including youth-serving community and faith based organizations, coalition partners who work towards youth justice, and most importantly, formerly incarcerated or systems-impacted youth and their families. The Office of Probation promised to hold Community Listening Sessions. To our knowledge, they have not fulfilled this promise. If the Board values transparency and accountability and seeks to uphold their commitment to addressing the county's racial and social inequities, a community-centered process must be at the helm *before* such detrimental changes to the Juvenile Justice System are implemented.

We ask the Board to pause efforts to close the facility until a comprehensive discussion, fully informed by stakeholder and community input and contextualized by a full reexamination of the county's youth justice system, can take place. We call for full transparency, inclusion, and accountability. Probation must abide by an implementation plan that incorporates robust and meaningful community involvement. The 3-month timeline is too short without sufficient community input. As it stands, there is only one youth in the Community Pathways Pilot Program. We ask Probation to broaden the pilot over the course of the next two years before closing the Ranch to ensure that judges have a viable, less restrictive option for youth placement. We ask that Probation co-create a Community Pathways option with formerly and currently incarcerated youth and their families to identify and analyze the problems and develop solutions that incorporate their voices and experiences. This must be done in a manner that centers racial justice, prioritizes the funding of community-based service providers, deemphasizes institutional confinement, and promotes health, healing, and wellness. We strongly oppose closure of the "Ranch," particularly if done outside the context of this larger conversation.

Again, we urge the Board of Supervisors to vote NO on the resolution to close the "Ranch" until the Probation Department prioritizes community involvement, transparency, and engagement of key institutional stakeholders.

The Safe Return Project
Carlos Fernandez

Young Women's Freedom Center
Tumani Drew

The following organizations support this message:

California Alliance for Youth and Community Justice
Contra Costa Budget Justice Coalition
Contra Costa Immigrant Rights Alliance
Contra Costa Public Defender's Association
Conscious Contra Costa
Ensuring Opportunity Campaign

Healthy Contra Costa
Lift Up Contra Costa
Monument Impact
Reimagine Public Safety Contra Costa
Reimagine Richmond
Rich City Rides
Richmond Progressive Alliance
Richmond City Council member Gayle McLaughlin
Richmond City Council member Claudia Jimenez
Richmond Vice Mayor Eduardo Martinez
RYSE Youth Center
Standing up for Racial Justice
Urban Tilth
West Contra Costa County Concilio Latino
Yes Nature to Neighborhoods

June McHuen

From: Meredith Desautels <mdesautels@ylc.org>
Sent: Monday, October 31, 2022 3:33 PM
To: John Gioia; Supervisor Candace Andersen; Diane Burgis; Supervisor Mitchoff; District5
Cc: Clerk of the Board
Subject: Public Comment for BOS Meeting 11/1/22 - Agenda Item D1.

Dear Members of the Board and Board Clerk,

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment for your meeting on Nov. 1, 2022, Agenda Item D1, Closure of the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility (Ranch).

My name is Meredith Desautels and I'm an attorney with the Youth Law Center, a non-profit legal organization that advocates on behalf of system-involved young people. We strongly urge you to VOTE NO on the proposal to close the Ranch. Closing the Ranch and relocating youth to the juvenile hall would result in an increase in the most secure confinement of youth. This is the opposite approach that Contra Costa should be taking at this moment.

As you know, under juvenile justice realignment, every county is receiving a grant under the state Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant. The intent of this program is to assist counties in implementing a public health approach to juvenile justice, and to develop a continuum of care to address youth needs.

Under the current proposal, Contra Costa would be closing a less restrictive facility and moving youth into the county's most restrictive facility -- the juvenile hall. The research on youth incarceration shows that the correctional environment of juvenile halls is extremely harmful to young people. The immediate harms are numerous, including increased rates of depression and risk of self-harm and suicide, increased risk of school drop-out and losses in reading and math, traumatic stress from family separation, and interrupted adolescent development. In the long-term, incarcerated youth face a higher risk of adult incarceration, a decreased likelihood of high school graduation, poor employment outcomes and poor health outcomes, including higher rates of mental health issues and early death. And these harms disproportionately impact youth of color, who are overrepresented in the system.

Given the immense negative consequences of incarceration, Contra Costa must invest its resources in less restrictive alternatives to the juvenile hall. This proposal does the opposite. We urge you to reject this proposal and convene a community process to plan for a full continuum of care for justice-involved youth in Contra Costa.

Thank you,
Meredith Desautels

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ATTN: Clerk of the Board
Supervisor John Gioia
Supervisor Candace Andersen
Supervisor Diane Burgis
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff
Supervisor Federal Glover

1 November 2022

Re Agenda Item D1: Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility Closure

In 2020, in Contra Costa, Black youths were 14 times more likely than white youths to be arrested, 15 times more likely to be referred to Probation, and 1.6 times more likely to have petitions filed. Even as total numbers of juvenile arrests and detentions have decreased, racial and ethnic commitment disparities remain profound and prevalent. Coming on the heels of the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice's formal launch, Probation's resolution to close the "Ranch" and expand the Hall violates the Office's spirit and mission *and* obstructs reduction of the racial disparities evidenced in the county's juvenile justice continuum.

Probation's stated vision is to "work collaboratively to create opportunities for those we serve to experience a positive outcome that strengthens the individual and makes the community safe." Yet, its navigation of this effort has been opaque and fragmented. Communication with the public, community-based organizations, relevant county stakeholders, and—in particular—systems-involved youth and their families, has been insufficient and inconsistent. Above all, the swift timeline to close the Ranch, coupled with lack of preparedness, resourcing, and evidence around the Community Pathways program, bodes dire consequences and portends *expansion* not reduction of a confinement setting that is detrimental to young people.

History has shown us that institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution. Confinement is a punishing, dangerous, and often traumatizing experience for youth, who typically already have a history of trauma and victimization. ***We cannot create spaces of hope and healing within institutions that are inherently punitive and traumatizing.***

Cornel West said, "*Love is what Justice looks like in public.*" **Jails are not Justice.** Please, supervisors, before closing the Ranch, demand that Probation holds robust stakeholder conversations, fully rolls out and evaluates the Community Pathways program, and uplifts the voices of systems-involved youth and families. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Rosekind