

Dear Supervisors: I know the County lost a lot of revenue due to COVID and that the County has extra expenses in the millions that may or may not be fully reimbursed by the State or Federal Government. This clearly is a time of uncertainty and producing a balanced budget is difficult. I hope in any deliberations regarding shortfalls, that the discussion of cutting funding to the Juvenile Hall does not again arise.

The County cost for the Hall is approximately \$2.1M (after minimal State funding). Projected county costs to run the Hall this fiscal year is a little less than \$2M. Approximately 80% of the Hall's budget is for salary and benefits and 20% is for services and supplies. I do not have the figure at hand but recall that our Hall runs at one of the lowest costs per youth in placement in the State at this time.

As most of the Hall's costs are in salary, and there are State staffing standards that have to be followed, there would be no way to leave the Hall open with much of a cut in its funding.

Any discussion of cuts now comes at a bad time given the Hall only recently stabilized itself. When the closure was recommended a couple of years ago, many staff left for other counties or transferred to other positions in the County. It was almost impossible to fill the positions given the risk that the Hall would be closed. Once the decision was made that the Hall was to remain open and the County supported the Hall, the Probation Department has been able to fill in positions with new and competent staff. It is only in the last two months that the Hall became fully staffed and that the staff completed their mandatory training. Having Dave Barrett at the helm has most definitely helped stabilize things as well. He has been bringing in new ideas and new enthusiasm.

It is also a bad time with COVID still in play. Our youth would be mixed with youth from another county thus increasing the risk of infection once they come back. Not only the interaction of our probation workers, attorneys, families, etc moving back and forth between counties almost daily.

The most likely and closest County to send our youth would be Sonoma County. I know many of you visited the Sonoma Hall so know that the facility is on Highway 12 about ten miles southeast of downtown Santa Rosa. It is approximately 20 minutes driving time in a car and 40 minutes by bus from downtown Santa Rosa. It is approximately 1 ½ hours by car from the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall to the Sonoma County Juvenile Hall. It is an almost impossible trip by public transportation for family visits.

A key component of a successful rehabilitation program is family and community connections. Those bonds of connection cannot but be damaged when sending our youth a distance out of the county. The State of California's adult correctional focus these past several years has centered on moving those incarcerated back to their local community and family to serve their sentence as there is a greater chance of success upon their release. This proposal to move our youth out of their community ignores the best chances at rehabilitation.

Currently, behavioral health services (both mental health and substance abuse counseling) that occur in the Hall, continue with the same counselors, once the youth is released from the Hall. This continuity of services, which is so vitally important, will not occur if the youth is moved to another county while in custody.

The Mendocino County Office of Education provides an exceptional educational service to the youth in the Hall. The Office of Education ensures that the same education plan is continued once the youth is released from the Hall. Most of the time, this transition is seamless. This will not be the case if the hall is closed.

Our youth will be exposed to a larger population of youth with some having far more serious offenses and issues than what youth generally have in our county. In the long run such exposure, and what those youth will bring back after their detention, will not be good for our community and may cost us all far more, socially and economically.

One of the consequences of sending our youth to another county is our Probation staff will have to transport them much longer distances. The time to transport youth back and forth to Court could better be spent on school and counseling services. Potentially, a fifteen-minute Court appearance becomes a full day of transport for our probation staff.

I think the actual dollar costs of having our youth in another County will exceed the earlier \$1M estimate. First, there is the contract cost itself. There is no guarantee that it will not go up. Tehama County recently raised its rate significantly so that Lake County is now rethinking their contract with them. I think we could be in store for a similar experience.

And there's still significant staff costs to Mendocino County: transporting youth back and forth to the Hall at all hours of the day and night. And transporting the youth to and from Court appearances and paying the public defender and Court advocates to travel back and forth. Add all these costs to the contract costs - the savings will not be all that much.

The Governor announced the State will be closing all of their juvenile detention facilities this coming January and sending all of the 755 youth in these facilities back to their county of origin. I do not know if we have any youth being returned but this may not be the best time to close our facility until we see what the impact will be.

There are also moves to have those over 18 treated as juveniles or at least housed separately from the older jail population. Our Hall could be modified to serve these offenders. And many of our 300 youth are sent out-of-county. Perhaps the Hall could be modified to retain these youth here at significant savings. In summary, I hope you can find other places to pull from to meet the shortfall without having to close the Hall. I know these are hard times and hard decisions have to be made. Thanks for listening. Gary

Gary Levenson-Palmer, Chair
Mendocino County Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Commission