

June 20, 2020

Members of the Board:

This is a hard time to be alive, with concurrent crises that can stop a life in its tracks at any moment and a crushed economy.

As you consider budget reductions, I ask that you do not reduce the Juvenile Hall budget. This is a challenge in how we will treat the most vulnerable youth of Mendocino County. A time of testing our humanity to our own extended family by seeking a solution that can't be found by simply sending our most troubled youth away to save money.

These young people are facing a critical turning point in their lives -- without a map. We face an opportunity to model our humanity or to turn our backs on them. This is an issue of heart and conscience, not just budget balancing.

The decision you make about Juvenile Hall can divide and alienate the children of our community or help them to heal as they go through their first step of initiation into adulthood – separation. The second step is reincorporation back to a productive life. Our youth are much better off in their own community, where many of them already have support and programs.

An old proverb says, *"If you know what harms yourself, you know what injures others."* Put yourself in the place of a 14-year-old boy or girl whose life has been dramatically interrupted. Would you want to be sent away to a distant detention facility, far from family, friends and amid exposure to elements of youth behavior so different from your own?

This is your opportunity to use your imagination to keep our youth connected or to help them lose their way completely. I call upon your wisdom and dedication to our community to do the right thing. As former President Obama said, *"These are all our children, we are all their parents."*

Hopefully,

John Azzaro

Member, Mendocino County Juvenile Justice Commission; Court Appointed Special Advocate.