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FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

*Celebrating 35 Years of Advocacy & Achievement*

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December 17, 2020

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
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FROM: Wendy Garen, Chair   
Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families

SUBJECT: **PREVENTING FURTHER RISK OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION IN  
JUVENILE HALLS AND CAMPS**

For the past several months, the Commission for Children and Families' (Commission) Ad Hoc Juvenile Justice Committee has been receiving updates on COVID-19 in the halls and camps from the Probation Department. We have watched with alarm as the numbers of infected youth and staff have continued to mount, and increasing numbers of youth have been under medical observation, been quarantined or in isolation related to exposure or positive tests. Last week's Los Angeles Times article (Leila Miller, 12/11/20) further highlighted what is now a crisis in our juvenile detention facilities, with staff especially showing greater numbers of infection almost daily.

At the same time, despite intentional efforts to decrease the number of young people coming into juvenile halls, there still appear to be a number of youth who come into the halls for very short stays rather than returning to family or placement in smaller group settings. The initial, effective efforts at releasing youth whose offenses were low-risk or who had served the majority of their time, which resulted in substantial lowering of numbers during the spring, seem to have fallen off considerably. The short stays of these youth, rotating between home, halls, and community placements, bring unnecessary and dangerous exposure both for the youth and for those they live with.

Over the past months, Commission representatives have spoken with staff from key departments that address the health, education and well-being of detained youth, including the Department of Public Health (DPH), Department of Health Services Juvenile Court Health Services (DHS), Department of Mental Health (DMH), and Office of Education (LACOE). We have seen encouraging signs including development of LACOE's distance education program, location of kiosks for virtual DMH services, improvements in testing protocols, increased access to family contact and opportunities for outdoor recreation, arts

programs, and other activities to help young people manage the daily stress of being detained during a pandemic. However, in the current climate of high infection and the constraints necessary to address it, detained youth are losing critical opportunities for interaction, education, extra-curricular activities, and socialization. They face a greater chance of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, **and** they contend with more social isolation, quarantine as routine, less activity, and more stress.

We know that you are aware of and concerned by these challenging conditions in juvenile detention facilities. We respectfully urge you to take additional steps to prevent further risk by:

1. Convening a task force immediately to decrease placement of youth in juvenile halls for short term stays, developing guidelines for alternatives and preventing unnecessary placement in juvenile detention facilities whenever possible. This task force should be comprised of representatives from the courts, attorneys, Department of Children and Family Services, Office of Diversion and Reentry, and Probation Department, along with other key stakeholders including young people and family members with lived experience; and
2. Working with the Probation Department, AFSCME Local 685, DPH, DHS, and other relevant stakeholders to develop guidelines and accountability mechanisms to protect the health and well-being of Probation Department staff. This group should review requirements and make recommendations for mask wearing requirements, social distancing, testing, other health precautions, and managing interpersonal contact during this challenging period.

Thank you for your continuing leadership during this difficult time. We appreciate all that you and your staff do, and stand ready to help in any way we can. You may contact me at [garen@rmpf.org](mailto:garen@rmpf.org) or the Commission's executive director, Tamara Hunter at [huntet@dcfs.lacounty.gov](mailto:huntet@dcfs.lacounty.gov) with any questions.

c: Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
Acting County Counsel  
Interim Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department  
Director, Children and Family Services  
Director, Department of Health Services  
Director, Department of Mental Health  
Director, Department of Public Health  
President, AFSCME Local 685  
Children's Deputies  
Health Deputies  
Justice Deputies

### *Our Mission*

The Commission for Children and Families advises the Board of Supervisors on strengthening service delivery systems and enhancing partnerships to create safer and more secure futures for Los Angeles County's at-risk children and their families.