

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**

I want to begin by saying that I applaud the commitment to reenvision and reinvest in youth justice in this county. And I applaud the intention to create a community pathways program that honors that commitment. Interventions to create safe and healthy communities cannot succeed without INVESTMENT in the resources and structures that produce and sustain them and DIVESTMENT in the punitive structures and institutions that inhibit child and adolescent development and preclude collective uplift.

Communities most impacted by systemic violence and harms understand best what keeps them and their youth safe: economic, educational, and personal enrichment opportunities; social-emotional and mental health supports; stable housing and food supply; and access to family and community care are among the key drivers of prosperity and well-being. We must center and elevate community-based guidance and support networks that offer young people stable and meaningful connections to positive role models and activities.

As we work to reenvision youth justice in this county, it's imperative that youth—particularly those who are currently incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated—and community are at the center of those conversations, not on the sidelines. 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 its communication insufficient and inconsistent, evidencing a failure of transparency and trust. Because I believe in the principles and practice of robust oversight and its efficacy in addressing stubborn patterns of racial disparities at the root of this country's criminal legal and carceral systems, I urge the supervisors to ensure that community input and oversight guide this effort, particularly when the impact of incarceration is so concentrated among communities of color.

Contra Costa's most recent report on Juvenile Justice Programs and Services documents that in 2020 Black youths were 14 times more likely than white youths to be arrested and 15 times more likely to be referred to Probation, showing that even as total numbers of juvenile arrests and detentions have decreased, racial and ethnic disparities remain profound and prevalent. The resolution to close the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility (aka "the Ranch") obstructs the urgent reduction of these disparities.

History has shown us that institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution. Confinement is a punishing, dangerous, and 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.***

Mass incarceration. Voter suppression. Redlining. Educational inequity. Environmental racism. Immigrant deportation. Workforce exclusion. State-sanctioned violence. Housing insecurity. Economic precarity. De jure and de facto segregation. These are not separate propellers or disconnected outcomes; they are interlinked hinges that have locked up and locked out low income and BIPOC individuals and continue to under-resource communities, underinvest in our youth, and undermine opportunity. ***Every hinge we remove has a multiplier effect that weakens the frame and rattles the core.***

Cornel West said, “*Love is what Justice looks like in public.*” ***Jails are not Justice.*** Please, supervisors: ***Blow apart the hinges.*** Before closing the Ranch, demand that Probation holds robust county and community stakeholder conversations that honor and uplift the experiences and voices of formerly and currently incarcerated youth and their families AND that they fully resource, roll out, and evaluate the Community Pathways program. Divest from a punitive lens and ***invest*** in one that is life-affirming, youth-empowering, and community-centered and grounded in love. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachel Rosekind