



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Probation

Subject: Report on Community Outreach for Juvenile Camp Program

Meeting Date: February 25, 2025

Formal Title: Consider report on community outreach on establishing a juvenile camp program at Juvenile Hall, approve in concept an "Ordinance Adding Chapter 2.130 To The Santa Cruz County Code Establishing Redwoods Coastal Academy At Juvenile Hall", and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Accept and file report on community outreach and feedback regarding establishing a juvenile camp program at Juvenile Hall;
2. Approve in concept an "Ordinance Adding Chapter 2.130 To The Santa Cruz County Code Establishing Redwoods Coastal Academy At Juvenile Hall";
3. Schedule ordinance for a second reading and final adoption on March 11, 2025;
4. Direct the Clerk of the Board to publish the Notice of Proposed Ordinance Summaries in a newspaper of general circulation at least five days prior to the scheduled second reading and final adoption, pursuant to Government Code Section 25124; and
5. Authorize the Chief Probation Officer to sign documents necessary to implement a five-bed juvenile camp program.

Executive Summary

The development of a juvenile camp program in Santa Cruz County is a strategic initiative aimed at improving the outcomes for justice-involved youth while maximizing local resources and maintaining community ties. The Probation Department is returning to present information on community outreach efforts and community feedback as directed by the Board.

Discussion

Juvenile Justice Realignment

California Senate Bill (SB) 823 was signed into law on September 30, 2020, effectively eliminating Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) custodial facilities and transferring the responsibility of care, custody, and supervision from the State to local jurisdictions. In Santa Cruz County, the Probation Department opened a local Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF) in December 2024, and there is currently one youth committed to the program.

Evidence gathered in support of Juvenile Justice Realignment demonstrated that justice system-involved youth are more successful when they remain connected to their

families and communities. Justice system-involved youth who remain in their communities have lower recidivism rates and are more prepared for their transition back into the community.

Without a juvenile camp program in Santa Cruz County, it has been necessary for Probation to contract with multiple counties to accept our youth when a juvenile camp placement is ordered by the Courts and for youth to step down or transition from a SYTF. Camp programs vary by location and may be operating within a juvenile hall or a separate facility and range from restrictive to non-restrictive environments. Current placement contracts have rates between \$140-\$522 per day/per youth. All determinations are made based on proximity, program offerings, availability, and acceptance of youth. The number of youth placed in a juvenile camp by the Courts varies by year. Over the past five years, there have been 18 camp placements with an average length of stay between 6-9 months, and 16 of 18 have been sent 183 miles away.

Local Juvenile Camp Program

To optimize local rehabilitation efforts, reduce reliance on external placements, and decrease General Fund appropriations, on October 8, 2024, the Probation Department asked the Board to approve utilizing the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall facility to provide programming and space for youth adjudicated to a juvenile camp as a Less Restrictive Program (LRP) or step-down program. At that time, the Board directed Probation to conduct outreach to gather community feedback and return to the Board for further discussion.

On October 31, 2024, the Probation Department convened a town hall meeting for community members and organizations to discuss establishing a juvenile camp program at the Juvenile Hall facility. Also on October 31, 2024, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council SB 823 Subcommittee was informed of the department's desire to develop a Camp program. Plans for a Camp program was also shared during the department's November 8, 2025, Youth Justice Convening which was attended by numerous County and community partners. An additional meeting with justice-involved youth and their families was scheduled for February 3, 2025. It was necessary to cancel the meeting due to community participation in advocacy events. In lieu of meeting in person, youth and families completed electronic surveys to inform our Camp and SYTF programming. The meeting with youth and families will be rescheduled and held before the end of this fiscal year.

Additionally, the Probation Chief has reviewed this request and the framework as well as purpose for creating a camp program locally with the Chair of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Commission (JJDP) and the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council SB 823 Subcommittee members. Probation will also be providing additional information to the JJDP at the next regularly scheduled meeting on February 13, 2025.

Probation has returned to the Board today to present feedback from the community town hall, information sharing sessions, and surveys.

Juvenile Hall Operations

The Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall facility operates two independent units with the capacity to provide individual rooms with restroom facilities for up to 40 youth. All rooms meet Title 15 juvenile detention facility standards including use for Camp, LRP, and step-down programs.

Probation is proposing designating five beds for the purpose of juvenile camp commitments. Housing of youth is based on classification, risk level, individual needs, and safety of all youth within the facility. The classification system is an ongoing process throughout a commitment.

The juvenile camp program will also serve as a step-down for re-entry for young people who need that level of transition services and supervision from SYTF.

Youth in juvenile camp programming will participate in programs with other youth in the unit, promoting social development and peer learning. Probation is already working with community partners, such as the County Office of Education and Cabrillo College to develop educational, vocational, and life skills programming unique to the needs of youth receiving a lengthy commitment to be served within the Juvenile Hall.

Benefits of a Local Juvenile Camp

There are significant benefits to providing a juvenile camp program in Santa Cruz County, including:

- **Family Proximity:** Keeping youth closer to home will facilitate equitable access to family visits and support, fostering better rehabilitation and reentry outcomes.
- **Continuity of Care:** Youth ordered to Camp, as well as youth transitioning from SYTF when needed, may be served without having to physically change locations and programming and without upsetting daily activities or interrupting or changing programs and curriculum. This would also provide continuity of treatment by allowing youth to remain with their mental health provider(s) and natural supports.
- **Financial Efficiency:** Maximizing utilization of Juvenile Hall staff, facility, and programs will reduce the need for external placements and free up local resources for other essential County services.

The establishment of a juvenile camp program within Santa Cruz County is designed to enhance local rehabilitation efforts, reduce reliance on out-of-county placements, and optimize the use of county resources by significantly reducing the burden on the County General Fund.

While \$469,000 in County General Funds are currently encumbered for various out-of-county Camp placements to ensure availability when court-ordered, the cost for providing these services at Santa Cruz Juvenile Hall would be substantially less. Probation also anticipates a reduction in Juvenile Hall medical and mental health

treatment costs with the California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) initiative, allowing the Health Services Agency to direct bill Medi-Cal for some services.

Financial Impact

Establishing a juvenile camp program within Santa Cruz County is estimated to result in annual cost savings of approximately \$300,000 in County General Funds by reducing the need for contracting costs related to out-of-county placements (GL Key 577000, Object 74032). Due to the program's late implementation in FY 2024-25, cost savings for the initial year are estimated at approximately \$100,000. The County Administrative Office will realign Juvenile Hall appropriations as appropriate at mid-year.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - Community Voices & Partnership
Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety

Submitted By:

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Recommended By:

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Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.