

April 8, 2025

The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 6630
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 357 – Oppose

Dear Senator Menjivar,

On behalf of the County of Santa Cruz, we write to inform you of our opposition to SB 357 which seeks to add Section 272.5 to the California Welfare and Institutions Code and authorize the Board of Supervisors of any county to delegate to another county department all or part of the duties and authorities concerning minors and young adults that are currently statutorily imparted to probation departments or probation officers.

In California, County probation has long been a cornerstone of the juvenile justice system, which serves both juveniles (12-17) and emerging adults (18-24) adjudicated for offenses ranging from minor misdemeanors to serious and violent felonies. The success of a local juvenile system is entirely dependent and attributable to the roles and responsibilities played by Probation in the community. In overseeing the entirety of the continuum, Probation is in a unique position to recognize the importance of working with youth in the prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation stages. That work, combined with additional training and research-based approaches, allows a probation department to support and foster the utilization of interventions on the front end of the continuum where a youth can be safely and appropriately supported in the community, thereby reserving detention for those youth who pose a public safety risk. When necessary, however, an order into detention must be handled by trained professionals knowledgeable in both rehabilitative and safety concepts developmentally appropriate for youth and young adults. Ultimately, Probation serves and balance the safety needs of the youth, families, the community, the County, and ultimately the court while working towards a rehabilitation plan developed specifically to a youth's individual needs.

In Santa Cruz County, Juvenile Probation has worked endlessly over the past 30 years to lower the numbers of youth that become justice involved and if they do, strive to help them find individual support with programs and the community. Moreover, our Probation staff has extensive training and experience in evidence-based approaches to working with youth and young adults. Just a few of our Probation Department's successful programs are:

- **Student Success Program (SSP)** - In 2018, the Santa Cruz County Probation and the County Office of Education (COE) launched the Student Success Project (SSP) to enhance Department educational success and prevent justice system involvement among South County students. Over the last 7 years, SSP has expanded to reach more youth and bring its proven prevention and intervention strategies to Rolling Hills and E.A. Hall Middle Schools. Through ongoing partnerships with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office and local non-profit agencies, SSP continues to empower students, strengthen communities, and reduce justice system involvement through proactive engagement and support. The scaling of the SSP included the addition of two student support specialists dedicated to the middle school sites in partnership with CAB.

- **Luna Evening Center (LEC)** - The LEC is a collaborative initiative involving Probation, community organizations, and county agencies, designed to support probation-involved youth while also serving as a key prevention and diversion effort. LEC assists youth facing challenges such as court compliance, substance use, and behavioral concerns by providing a structured, after-school environment (Mon – Friday from 4-8pm) As a short-term, community-based alternative to detention, LEC reduces reliance on Juvenile Hall and helps prevent deeper system involvement.
- **Luna Y Sol Familia Center and Youth and Family Advisory Council** - Strategically located in the heart of the community in Watsonville, the center provides a wide array of resources, including educational support, behavioral health connections, youth employment opportunities, and legal aid services. The Luna y Sol Familia Center further enhances its support through culturally relevant programming, including Cara y Corazón, Joven Noble, and Girasol—initiatives developed by the National Compadres Network to promote cultural healing and address the diverse challenges faced by families.
- **Aztecas Youth Soccer Academy (Aztecas)** - Established in 2008, the Aztecas Soccer Program has grown into a cornerstone of prevention and diversion efforts, providing transformative opportunities for system-involved and at-risk youth. This highly regarded pro-social mentorship program is dedicated to reclaiming the lives of young people impacted by gangs, violence, poverty, and substance use. Aztecas serves both probation and non-probation youth, leveraging the power of soccer and community engagement to foster resilience, personal growth, and success.

Moreover, our data also reflects a transformational approach to detained youth since 1995. The average daily population from 1995 to 2024 has drastically decreased.

- Juvenile Hall: Population numbers have decreased from 52 youths down to 9.
- In a Ranch Camp Program: 35 youth to 0 youth.
- DJJ/SYTF Placement: 11 youth to 3 youth.

Most recently our Juvenile Hall has now incorporated a Secure Youth Treatment Facility and step-down Camp programming. This allows our youths to stay local and connected to their natural support in family and community.

If any of these services or responsibilities were to be redirected or transferred to another department, it is anticipated that every County would see immediate and widespread negative impacts to community safety, local coordination among entities, training requirements, fiscal efficiencies, and most importantly negatively impact the balance of safety and the individualized treatment needs for each youth.

For these reasons, we must oppose SB 357.

Sincerely,

Supervisor Felipe Hernandez
Chair of the Santa County Board of Supervisors

Cc: All Members and Consultants of the Senate Committee on Public Safety