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Leno Bill Limiting Room Confinement in Juvenile Facilities Approved by the Assembly

SACRAMENTO – Senator Mark Leno’s (D- San Francisco) bill to limit the use of room confinement in juvenile facilities was approved by the State Assembly today and now heads to the Senate for concurrence before reaching the Governor’s desk. Senate Bill 1143 states that room confinement can only be used after less restrictive options have been tried and bans its use for the purposes of punishment, coercion, convenience or retaliation.

“Senate Bill 1143 protects the health and dignity of the young people in our care,” said Senator Leno. “Limiting the use of room confinement in our juvenile detention facilities will lead to better rehabilitative outcomes and a safer correctional environment for staff and youth.”

Senate Bill 1143 provides a uniform definition of “room confinement” as the placement of a youth in a sleeping room or cell alone with minimal contact from facility staff. In addition, the bill requires that room confinement is limited to four hours generally, can only be used after all less restrictive options have been exhausted and cannot be used to the extent that it compromises the mental and physical health of the person.

Juvenile justice and youth development experts recognize the harmful effects of room confinement to the rehabilitation of detained youth. More than 20 states ban the use of isolation in juvenile facilities for punitive reasons and in early 2016, President Obama issued an executive order limiting isolation for youth in federal juvenile facilities and banning its use for the purposes of punishment and discipline.

“We appreciate the Assembly passed SB 1143 today and agree this well-crafted and thoroughly vetted policy is an important step for California’s juvenile justice system,” said Mark Bonini, President of the Chief Probation Officers of California. “The primary goal of Probation Juvenile Detention is to provide a safe and secure environment for youth and staff and to ensure youth in our facilities are engaged in education and programming. This bill reflects this mission by limiting the use of room confinement of youth in California’s juvenile facilities and continuing to create opportunities for positive outcomes.”

The bill is sponsored by the Chief Probation Officers of California and supported by human rights advocates, experts on youth rehabilitation and faith leaders. It represents a multi-year effort that positions California to lead the nation in providing standards to ensure the safety and welfare of youth and staff in juvenile facilities.