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Probation Chiefs and Youth Advocates Partner on Legislation to Address Room Confinement in Juvenile Facilities

Sacramento, CA – The Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) and youth advocates announced today that they have joined forces to co-sponsor landmark legislation limiting the use of room confinement for youth in California’s juvenile facilities.

As amended this week, Senate Bill 1143 represents a critical breakthrough and unique partnership between CPOC and juvenile justice advocates who have agreed on a way to create safer facilities for youth and facility staff throughout the state. Previous bills intended to limit the use of room confinement did not have the support of CPOC and failed to pass both houses of the California Legislature. SB 1143 is authored by Senator Mark Leno, D-San Francisco.

"This bill protects the basic human rights and dignity of youth residing in local jails and juvenile camps," said Senator Leno. "It also protects public safety by ensuring that youth get the educational and rehabilitative opportunities they need to come home with the best chance of success in life."

This year, President Obama banned the long-term isolation of youth in federal detention facilities. With SB 1143, California is poised to follow his example. California has the opportunity to proactively establish model standards to limit the use of room confinement and lead the way for other states throughout the country to prioritize the health, safety, and rehabilitation of youth in detention.

"The Chief Probation Officers of California are pleased to announce our co-sponsorship of SB 1143," CPOC President Mark Bonini said. "We appreciate the dialogue with Senator Leno and all of the stakeholders on this legislation who share our goal of ensuring that youth in our facilities are engaged in education, programming, and pro-social activities in a safe and secure environment. This measure prohibits the use of room confinement for punishment and sets forth requirements for the use of room confinement in a manner that meets the needs, safety and well-being of our youth and staff while continuing to allow for necessary operations within our facilities."

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 provides that room confinement is limited to 4 hours generally, and shall 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.

“The effort to end long-term isolation for youth has been years in the making, and we believe this new partnership is critical to establish California as a model for the rest of the country,” said Ella Baker Center Director of Programs Jennifer Kim. “The most effective reforms are the ones supported by advocates and the people who have to enforce them.”

Unlike SB 124 (Leno, 2015) and other prior bills that regulated “solitary confinement,” SB 1143 uses “room confinement,” a term widely used by experts in the U.S. to describe when youth are in cells or rooms alone, rather than in general programming.

"Being in isolation affects youth long after they come home," said Kim McGill, an organizer with Youth Justice Coalition. "This historic bill will maintain youth and staff safety while also ensuring youth development."

This bill is co-sponsored by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Youth Justice Coalition, California Public Defenders Association, the Children’s Defense Fund-CA, Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice—Bay Area, National Religious Campaign Against Torture, Pacific Juvenile Defender Center, and the Chief Probation Officers of California.

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