

California Youth Authority Warehouses:

Failing Kids, Families & Public Safety



**Closing the warehouses and creating rehabilitation centers
is the solution to the CYA crisis**

An Issue Briefing from

Books Not Bars



*The Center on
Juvenile and
Criminal Justice*

CYA Warehouses: Failing Kids, Families & Public Safety

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About Books Not Bars

Books Not Bars (BNB) is an advocacy organization working for policies, programs, and priorities that support youth opportunities instead of incarceration and harm. BNB coordinates **Families for Books Not Bars** — a statewide network of families of CYA youth to whom we provide support, assistance, and civic engagement opportunities — and **Let's Get Free** — an Oakland-based youth leadership development group.

About the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

Headquartered in San Francisco, the **Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice** (CJCJ) provides direct services, technical assistance and policy research in the criminal justice field. The Center includes offices in Oakland, California and The District of Columbia. CJCJ maintains a professional staff with diverse backgrounds and expertise in the various components of criminal justice with its senior staff members possessing over fifteen years experience in the justice field.

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**Closing the warehouses and creating rehabilitation centers
is the solution to the CYA crisis**

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**“From the perspective of a child development expert, the changes in CYA
should start with the buildings.”**

- Judge Leonard Edwards, Santa Clara County



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
CYA Warehouses: Abusive & Ineffective	3
CYA Warehouses: Structurally Unsuitable for Rehabilitation	5
CYA Warehouses: Costly & Obsolete	7
Closing Warehouse Facilities: A National Trend	9
The Solution: Close CYA Warehouses, Create Rehabilitation Centers	11
Conclusion	13
Endnotes	15



Executive Summary

CYA Warehouses: Failing Kids, Families & Public Safety is an expert report detailing solutions to the current California Youth Authority crisis. The report shows that the Youth Authority's large, remote, outdated prisons fail to rehabilitate young people in trouble and harm public safety, at a cost of \$400 million per year to the state budget.

The report makes four major findings:

The California Youth Authority Is a Failed System

California is currently spending \$400 million per year on a system that harms young people and fails the public safety test. With a 90 percent recidivism rate, four deaths in 2004 alone, and documented cases of abuse and neglect at the hands of guards, the CYA must be restructured.

The Current CYA Warehouse Prisons Are Costly, Obsolete, and Structurally Unsuited for Rehabilitation

There is a growing consensus that the CYA must be restructured. But this "restructuring" cannot consist of mere surface reforms to the existing large facilities. Such superficial changes are bound to fail. Experts say the warehouse facilities' design per se creates six roadblocks to effective rehabilitation:

- The large, chaotic dorms and solitary confinement units create and exacerbate mental and physical health issues;
- The size and design of the facilities makes them unmanageable and leads to a culture of violence among both staff and wards;
- The size and design of the facilities leads to excessive staff absenteeism, turnover and lack of accountability;
- The size and design of the facilities prevents the kind of focused leadership necessary for effective rehabilitation;
- The remote facilities prevent family involvement, which experts say is crucial to effective rehabilitation.
- The large warehouse facilities are so decrepit that it is more cost effective to close them than to fix them.

One in Five States Have Closed Their Large Facilities to Great Success

From Missouri to Utah to Massachusetts, states have closed their warehouse youth prisons and replaced them with small, rehabilitation-based centers. These systems are far more effective at protecting public safety. They are also far less expensive.

SOLUTION: California Should Close Its Warehouse Youth Prisons and Replace Them with Rehabilitation Centers

CYA Warehouses finds that California can reap significant cost savings from facility closures, and then plough those savings into the creation of a new system.

According to CYA statistics, California could save \$69 million in the first fiscal year by closing just three facilities. The State could save more than \$160 million in the first year by closing all eight warehouse prisons. California can also tap into significant federal funding streams — including Medicaid and Title IV-E foster care funds — to run its new system.

Calling for the closure of the warehouse prisons and their replacement with regional rehabilitation centers, the report lays out the successful experiences of other states in making this transition.

The eight large facilities, with their decades-long record of abuse and lack of positive programming, are the heart of the problem. They need \$270 million worth of repairs — two-thirds of that being for "critical infrastructure deficiencies." The California Legislative Analyst's Office has noted that it may be less expensive and more effective to replace these obsolete facilities than to pour money into them for repairs.



California's juvenile justice system is in crisis. There is only one way out of it. We must close these abusive, warehouse-like prison facilities and replace them with small rehabilitation centers. Without this basic change in infrastructure, California's juvenile justice system is doomed to remain mired in scandal, controversy and violence.

Introduction

The California Youth Authority: A Failed System

The purpose of the juvenile justice system is to rehabilitate youth in trouble and protect the public. By all accounts, the California Youth Authority (CYA) fails to achieve these goals. The CYA is the state-run system of eight prison-like facilities, four fire-fighting training camps, and parole services for youth in repeat or serious trouble. The information and recommendations of this report are focused specifically on the eight secure facilities.

There are roughly 3,450 youth in the eight facilities, 248 youth in the fire camps, and another 3,755 youth on parole from CYA.² These youth range in age from 12 to 25 years and come from a diverse background. Over half are incarcerated in CYA on charges considered nonviolent.³

The CYA is required to provide education, training and treatment for these youth and to protect the public. Instead California is currently spending \$400 million⁴ per year on large prison-like facilities in remote locations that harm young people and public safety. Report after report has revealed youth warehoused in large dorms where violence is rampant, or isolated in prison cells and solitary confinement. The staff primarily play a custodial/ punishment role and the program offerings are paltry at best.

With a 90 percent recidivism rate,⁵ the CYA is failing to protect the public. The CYA warehouses have become revolving doors that perpetuate the cycle of abuse. The prison-like facilities, with their culture of brutality and lack of positive programming, prevent young people from turning their lives around. The results are clear: nine out of ten are rearrested within three years.

New Directions

The intensity of these recurring problems came into sharp focus last year. 2004 was a year of unprecedented public attention and scandal for the California Youth Authority (CYA). On January 4, 2004, five expert reports on conditions in CYA, commissioned in response to a lawsuit filed by the Prison Law Office in 2003, were released. Conducted by CYA-approved experts, these reports showed horrific abuse widespread in the CYA system. On January 12, 2004, a young man at the Chad facility in Stockton died by ingesting a cleaning solvent.⁶ Then, on January 19, 2004, two youth committed suicide in the Preston facility in Lone.⁷ In March, guards were caught on tape viciously beating two young men in the Chad facility.⁸ Most recently, on September 5, 2004, a fourth young man was found dead in his cell at the Chad

facility in Stockton.⁹

In response to this unprecedented attention, policymakers, system officials, juvenile justice experts, families and youth have proposed sweeping changes and begun working towards reform. These efforts are building rapidly. Already, events in 2005 indicate new hope and real possibility for change. On January 31, the Prison Law Office and the CYA filed in court a sweeping reform agreement as part of the consent decree that settled the lawsuit in late-2004.¹⁰ The agreement requires that the CYA design an entirely new rehabilitative juvenile justice model for the state. This model must include specialized, positive programming for youth, family involvement, increased staffing ratios, and properly trained staff.

What the agreement does not explicitly require, however, is that the CYA close any of its existing eight facilities as part of its new juvenile justice model for the state. These prison facilities are large, remote, outdated, dangerous, and cannot provide the right environment within which to conduct rehabilitative programming.

The National Trend Toward Reform: Smaller Works Better

The states with the most successful juvenile justice systems agree: in order to achieve effective reform, it is necessary to close the prison facilities and transition to a model of small centers and community-based programs. Residential centers should have 30 beds or less, be located close to home, be fully equipped with classrooms and treatment rooms, be staffed by teachers and counselors instead of prison guards, and be absent of bars, barbed-wire, and other prison-like conditions.

Systems with small centers built for rehabilitation work: they are more effective at preventing recidivism and they are more cost-effective. Missouri spends about half as much per youth as California does, at \$44,000¹¹ and \$80,000¹² respectively. Closing facilities is the best way to reduce California's astronomical costs. California could save over \$70 million in the first fiscal year alone by closing only three of the CYA facilities.¹³

And even with lower costs, the Missouri system is far more effective at rehabilitation. Missouri's recidivism rate is **15 percent**,¹⁴ compared to California's **90 percent**.

If California tries to implement a rehabilitative model within the existing CYA facilities, it is bound to fail. Now is the time to close these outdated prison facilities and move to a model with a track record of success.

"These institutions are like warehouses where they keep kids. They have nothing to give you except more time on your sentence."

- Former CYA youth¹



CYA WAREHOUSES

Abusive & Ineffective

"It's a straight danger zone — period."

Former CYA youth



There are eight CYA facilities across the state. Three are in Stockton, and the remaining five are in Ione, Paso Robles, Ventura, Norwalk, and Chino. The largest facility holds 1,200 youth, and the average facility holds almost 500.¹⁵ The oldest facility was built in 1894,¹⁶ and the average age of the facilities is 43 years.¹⁷

These facilities are virtually indistinguishable from adult prisons. They are enormous structures, surrounded by guard towers, spotlights, high fences, and barbed wire.¹⁸ Some have been described as medieval fortresses or dungeons.¹⁹ Inside, there are dingy concrete walls, few windows, poor lighting,²⁰ and, according to the CYA Chief of Security, "myriad blind spots in which assaults [can] take place without staff being able to witness."²¹

Youth in CYA are held in either solitary cells or large, cafeteria-size dormitory rooms. With a recidivism rate of 90 percent, it is clear that neither structure works for rehabilitation.

Solitary Confinement: Violence & Neglect

"You come out of visiting hours happy. But then you have to go back to the box, locked in your room for twenty-three hours a day. You only get one hour for break. You wait for next Saturday."

Former CYA youth



"[On lockdown]they come in at 6:00 and take all your blankets. You're in the room all day –it's cold – in just your boxers and socks. All day until 10:00 at night. There are roaches and spiders running around the room. Guys who have been in there for months have used the bathroom on the floor."

Former CYA youth



Of the eight facilities, two of the most violent are **Chad** in Stockton and **Stark** in **Chino**. In 2002, over 1,500 instances of assault – more than 4 per day -- were documented at these two facilities alone.²² Virtually all youth in these facilities (94 percent) are in solitary cells, and youth on lockdown are only allowed outside of them for 5 minutes to a few hours.²³ Chad models the '270 degree design' from the adult system,

where a central guard station can view hundreds of cells, stacked and crammed closely together.²⁴ Chino is equally prison-like with long, foreboding hallways of solitary cells. All day, youth hear the clanging of cell doors and a hundred screaming voices, but are unable to see the faces of their peers or engage in meaningful interactions.

The solitary cells are only 8.5 x 11 feet. Most of the cells have metal or concrete beds, a sink, and a toilet. Additionally, most cells lack windows, and some are without lighting at all, (allegedly to keep youth from damaging the equipment).²⁵

FACILITY	LOCATION	SIZE
Stark	Chino	1,148
Preston	Ione	702
Paso Robles	Paso Robles	658
Ventura	Ventura	650
Chad	Stockton	550
DeWitt	Stockton	400
Reception Center	Norwalk	379
O.H. Close	Stockton	365

Today, youth facilities like Chino and Chad are "widely regarded as obsolete from a design perspective."²⁶ **Former CYA Director Pearl West calls the Chino facility a "design mistake."** West continues, "I would never build that kind of institution now. [Chino] was built too much like a prison. We fight that architecture every day."²⁷

Open Dormitories

"Just living in that environment with 70, 80-some wards, everyday. Nothing to do but violence. Nothing else to do, but violence."

Former CYA youth



"After 10:00 there's only one staff member confined to a station . . . seventy-five wards, lights out . . . [I saw] one guy get up in the middle of the night while the staff member was in there snoozing . . . and he sexually assaulted another guy."

Former CYA youth



Four of the remaining facilities, **Preston**, **Paso Robles**, **DeWitt**, and **O.H. Close**, mostly consist of open dormitory rooms that

hold about 50-80 youth in the same cramped space.²⁸ Steve Lerner of the Commonweal Institute describes the units as follows: “after a few hours in a CYA living unit, the noise, activity level, and sheer impact of fifty young male bodies brings home vividly the fact that there are simply too many young men sharing the same space.”²⁹ He adds that youth are “constantly bumping into each other.”³⁰

Governor’s Schwarzenegger’s recently commissioned Corrections Independent Review Panel report concludes that “the reform school dormitory layout is not secure or efficient for programming and housing.”³¹ Lerner succinctly summarizes the current consensus: “Young people will not be rehabilitated if they are housed in fifty-ward dormitories that are crowded, noisy, and devoid of privacy.”³²

CYA WAREHOUSES

Structurally Unsuitable for Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is not possible within the CYA's eight facilities. Even with increased staff and better programs, the very fact of being in a facility with hundreds of other youth is disorienting and alienating.

The more youth in a facility, the higher potential for a culture that is hierarchical, competitive, and chaotic. According to juvenile justice experts Michael J. McMillen and James W. Brown, "as the size of a facility increases . . . much of the 'rule making' [is left] to peer pressure and dominant subcultures in the group."³³

This is why education experts recommend smaller schools; beyond classroom size, institution size has a significant impact on students. According to Ned Loughran, director of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, "With large [facilities] it's like going to a large urban high school. Kids get lost, and these kids can't afford to get lost."³⁴ The chaotic culture of CYA facilities results in serious consequences for both youth and staff.

Health Problems

"I still to this day sleep with my head over my face, because you have to worry about somebody walking past and hitting you in the face with a lock."

Former CYA youth



Warehouse-type institutions have an extremely detrimental impact on the health of the youth inside. Lerner describes a number of health problems that result from prison-like facilities: "the tension of living in noisy, crowded quarters causes anxiety, dermatological problems, high blood pressure, and other stress-related diseases, in addition to a number of mental and emotional problems."³⁵

According to Barry Krisberg, Director of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, "the noise levels and chaotic environment of the [CYA] lockup units [lead] to conditions of insomnia and . . . sleep deprivation. Most wards reported symptoms of severe depression, including suicidal ideation."³⁶

Violence

"It's very tense all the time. You have to be prepared to fight."

Former CYA youth



Moreover, warehouse-type facilities are notorious for high-levels of violence among youth. According to Krisberg, at least 10 serious assaults occur in the CYA each day.³⁷

This conservative estimate only accounts for incidents documented by staff or admitted by wards in interviews. Considering that youth find themselves in poor health, with insufficient sleep, and with either 49 roommates or no human interaction, it is easy to see how conflicts can erupt and escalate.

"You have to learn the game, know how to accommodate. The environment, in a nutshell, is just really confrontational."

- Former CYA youth

Remoteness

"We lived six hours from the facility, so visiting him was so difficult. When we couldn't make it out there, his whole demeanor would change."

Parent of CYA youth



The CYA prisons are located in extremely remote and rural areas: lone, Stockton, Paso Robles, Chino. The great majority of the youth inside, however, are from urban areas. The remote location makes it extremely difficult for families to visit their youth and for youth to be linked with community-based organizations to assist with their transition back home. Because youth in CYA will be returning to their communities, it is crucial that they remain connected to the support systems that will ensure successful re-entry. The consensus among juvenile justice experts is that having strong family relationships is one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism.³⁸

Additionally, Governor's Schwarzenegger's Corrections Independent Review Panel

found that the remote locations of the CYA prisons made it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.³⁹ With local

rehabilitation centers, all the key players can be at the table: youth, families, community-organizations, and the best possible staff.

Staff Difficulties & Institutionalized Culture of Inefficiency

"You go in there and you're supposed to feel secure, you're supposed to get help. But their attitude is, I don't care what you do, as long as you don't make my shift hard."

Former CYA youth



Prison-like, warehouse facilities also prove difficult for staff and administrators. As a threshold matter, when staff and youth feel antagonistic toward their environment, they are less likely to take care of it. According to Sim Van der Ryn, former State Architect and a professor of architecture at U.C. Berkeley, "the degree to which people can personalize their

habitation is a good indicator of the degree to which they will protect or maintain it."⁴⁰ In the current CYA prisons, youth and staff antagonism toward the facilities is widespread.

Not surprisingly, Loughran notes that warehouse-type facilities have higher rates of "staff turnover and absenteeism."⁴¹ William Michelson, Professor of Social Ecology at University of California at Irvine notes that warehouse youth facilities "make more remote the position of individuals within them [and] tend to promote inactivity."⁴² Staff absenteeism is a huge problem at CYA. At the Ventura facility, for example, between April and August of 2004, 30 percent of educational classes were cancelled due to teacher absences.⁴³ By bringing facilities down to manageable levels, staff can focus on their job of rehabilitating youth.

Finally, in a prison-like facility, it is difficult to provide the kind of focused leadership necessary for success. Paul DeMuro, former chief of youth prisons in Pennsylvania, notes that "it's critical that the director of the facility know every kid by name."⁴⁴ With warehouse-size facilities, for the director to know the unique circumstances of each youth is simply not possible.

CYA WAREHOUSES

Costly & Obsolete

According to the Legislative Analysts Office, the CYA “is approaching the point where buildings and infrastructure must either be replaced or require significant investment for renovation and renewal.”⁴⁵ The office raises the need for closure and replacement: **“If a building is functionally and physically obsolete, spending money on renovations may not be the best decision . . . it may be appropriate to consider closure and development of a replacement institution.”**⁴⁶

Warehouse-scale facilities are simply expensive to manage and maintain. The current CYA facilities are in need of **\$270 million** of deferred maintenance and renovations.⁴⁷ Over \$187 million constitute “critical infrastructure deficiencies.”⁴⁸ The facility with the greatest need is **Stark** in Chino, at \$54 million.⁴⁹

The main reason for these high costs is that the buildings are

old and falling apart. With an average age of 43 years, funds are needed for basics like fire protection sprinklers, and food storage.⁵⁰ Additionally, Krisberg notes, “because most of the YA institutions are so antiquated and in such a general state of disrepair, many of the units lack safe and effective methods of feeding wards who were confined to their rooms.”⁵¹

Another reason for the high renovation costs is that the facilities are not equipped with enough classrooms and treatment rooms. This has caused CYA to violate its state mandates for education and mental health programming. “Mandates to provide mental health and educational programs have resulted in the department having facilities that are in many ways functionally obsolete.”⁵² To help meet these deficiencies, the CYA currently utilizes a number of temporary buildings as classrooms, which lack basics like heating and cooling.⁵³



Closing Warehouse Facilities: A National Trend

The states that have had the most success in juvenile justice reform have **closed their prison-like, warehouse facilities**. California must follow the lead of these exemplary states if it is to create a true rehabilitative model.

At least 10 states have closed large, warehouse-like facilities over the past 35 years as part of sweeping reform efforts. States like Missouri and Massachusetts, which closed facilities during the 1970's and 1980's, today have what are regarded as the country's most successful juvenile justice systems.

Spotlight on Missouri

According to the Missouri administration, moving to a system of small, regional rehabilitation centers was "crucial to improving its juvenile corrections system."⁵⁴ In 1983, Missouri closed two large, warehouse facilities where youth were being beaten and kept in solitary confinement. John Tindall, former Superintendent at one of the facilities, describes the conditions: "I saw black eyes, battered faces, broken noses . . . the usual corrective procedure among the guards was to knock a boy down with their fists, then kick him in the groin."⁵⁵

Today, Missouri has a system of community-based alternatives and about 30 small, local centers with no more than 30-40 youth per center.⁵⁶ For these centers, Missouri used large residential homes, former schools, and even a convent.⁵⁷ Each center has small bedrooms, shared by a few youth, and at least one classroom, treatment room, and common room.⁵⁸ Youth are allowed privacy with basics like doors on bathroom stalls and curtains on showers.⁵⁹ The walls are covered with positive images, mostly created by the youth themselves.⁶⁰

Missouri boasts an exemplary recidivism rate. In a 2003

study, Missouri found that after 3 years of being released, only 8 percent of youth had been incarcerated in the adult system. Another 6.8 percent had been re-committed to the youth system.⁶¹ What is more, the Missouri system is much more cost-effective than the CYA system. Missouri spends almost half as much per year as CYA, at \$44,000 per youth.⁶²

Missouri's transformation is not an isolated success story. States from every region of the country have closed warehouse facilities and transitioned to a more effective system of small, residential centers, and local alternatives.

Massachusetts: The State That Sparked a National Trend

During the 1960's, Massachusetts juvenile facilities were referred to as 'human warehouses,' and serious abuse was occurring: "staff used force and made . . . children drink water from toilets, or scrub floors on their hands and knees for hours on end. Solitary confinement was also used extensively."⁶³ Then in 1970, new Division of Youth Services Commissioner Jerome Miller made history by closing the large facilities and transferring youth to local programs.⁶⁴ Miller tried to institute reforms within the existing facilities, but experienced failure.⁶⁵ By the mid-1970's, Miller had closed five facilities and transferred over 1,000 youth to small, community-based programs.⁶⁶ Currently, the residential programs house about 7-18 youth each.⁶⁷ A study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) showed that closing these facilities led to "a significant decline in incidence and severity" of reoffending.⁶⁸

UTAH: A New System, Fully Funded by Facility Closures

In 1975, Utah closed its only youth prison – the 450-bed Youth Development Center -- as part of a lawsuit. Like Massachusetts, Utah moved to a community-based system.⁶⁹ As part of the transition, each youth was interviewed to determine proper placement, and "funds previously used to support YDC residents followed them to the new community-based programs."⁷⁰ Utah was able to make the transition with virtually no increase in its overall budget.⁷¹ Today, Utah has three residential facilities, each with no more than 30 youth.⁷² The facilities are

described as follows: "Carpets . . . are used to keep noise levels down, individual rooms are provided for privacy . . . even the furniture is chosen to give the facility a home-like look."⁷³ According to the Director of the Utah system: "95 percent of DYC graduates with a previous history of violent offenses are violence-free during the year after leaving the agency."⁷⁴

PENNSYLVANIA: College Dorm Atmosphere Improves Recidivism Rate

One in five states across the nation have closed their large, poorly designed youth prison facilities and replaced them with smaller, more effective rehabilitation centers.

In 1975, Pennsylvania removed all 400 youth from a prison called Camp Hill after a young man committed suicide.⁷⁵ As in Utah, the individual circumstances of each young person was examined to determine the best placement.⁷⁶ To coordinate this process, Pennsylvania established the Center for Community Alternatives, with four regional offices that worked to create new programs for youth coming out of the youth prison.⁷⁷ One such program is described as having “an atmosphere more reminiscent of a college dorm than a correctional facility . . . students live in two-person carpeted rooms, which they are permitted to decorate.”⁷⁸ Today, the state funds 75 percent-90 percent of the cost of community-based services so that counties have incentives to keep youth local.⁷⁹ Recent recidivism rates for Pennsylvania’s new facilities range from 16-30 percent.⁸⁰

COLORADO: Serving Youth in Groups of Only 15

In 1987, Colorado closed one of its youth prisons as part of its reform process.⁸¹ Colorado expanded its community-based services and established “community review boards” to ensure that residential placement is used only as a last resort.⁸² Today, youth convicted of violent offenses are housed in groups of only 15 and families are heavily involved in the programming.⁸³ The youth spend the final 6-12 months of their sentences in community-based programs.⁸⁴ Almost 60 percent of youth leave the program with a high school diploma or GED.⁸⁵ The recidivism rate for Colorado’s Youth Offender System is about 20 percent.⁸⁶

FLORIDA: Classes in Boat Repair Help Youth Turn Their Lives Around

Two Florida warehouse facilities were closed as part of a class action lawsuit in 1987.⁸⁷ The state invested significant funds in a new community-based system called “Juvenile Alternative Services Programs.”⁸⁸ The Associated Marine Institutes (AMI) is one nonprofit that runs 27 such programs.⁸⁹ The staff ratio at AMI’s residential programs is 1 to 7, each youth receives comprehensive counseling and case-management services, and the program includes a 90-day aftercare component.⁹⁰ There, youth have the opportunity to swim, fish, sail, and learn how to repair boats, in addition to more traditional academic classes. The recidivism rate for AMI programs is 20 percent.⁹¹

KENTUCKY: Governor’s Dedication Results in Broad Reform

Because of the abusive conditions in its youth facilities, the federal government suspended Kentucky’s funding in 1995, and Kentucky volunteered to a consent decree.⁹² The Governor adopted juvenile justice as one of his main priorities, and as part of the consent decree, Kentucky closed 3 facilities.⁹³ Today, Kentucky’s residential programs have no more than 35 beds, and the consent decree has been lifted.

According to Kentucky’s Department of Juvenile Justice: “While many state’s out-of-home placement options are limited to two or three large institutions, Kentucky is able to serve youth in a variety of small programs designed to meet specific treatment needs.”⁹⁴

LOUISIANA: Legislative Leadership Leads to Closure of Violent Youth Prison

The Swanson Correctional Center for Youth in Tallulah was notorious for violence. After a young man was beaten to death by a guard, the legislature passed the Juvenile Justice Act of 2003, which closed the Tallulah facility.⁹⁵ The Governor went beyond the mandate of the legislature and closed the prison seven months early.⁹⁶ The number of youth in residential facilities has already been decreased by two-thirds, and Louisiana has dedicated funds to transition to a system of community-based centers.⁹⁷ Additionally, the state has received \$6 million dollars in federal funding to build small facilities modeled after those in Missouri.⁹⁸

NORTH CAROLINA: Legislature and Department Agree to Close 4 of 5 Facilities

As part of a legislative mandate, the Department of Juvenile Justice announced plans to close four of its five youth prisons in April 2004.⁹⁹ Some of the facilities are over 60 years old, and there was documentation of “infrastructure hazards, weak education, inadequate counseling, and deep staffing problems.”¹⁰⁰ In place of these facilities, the state will create 14 small, local centers, with about 32 beds each.¹⁰¹ Funding for the new facilities was allocated in July 2004.¹⁰² Among the goals of the switch, according to the Department Director, is to “make it easier for families to visit and be part of their child’s treatment [and] make it easier [for youth] to get into community counseling programs.”¹⁰³ The vision for the new facilities is that they be “school-like” with an emphasis on “education” and “treatment.”¹⁰⁴

NEW MEXICO: Funds from Costly Facility Re-Directed to Community Programs

In June 2004, the state closed its only high-security institution for youth, the 96-bed Camino Nuevo facility.¹⁰⁵ There was so much violence in the facility, it was described as a “war zone.”¹⁰⁶ Youth from Camino Nuevo were moved to small cottages that house less than 22 youth each.¹⁰⁷ The Department director explains: “We need[ed] to develop an environment to rehabilitate, so the kids [could] go home to their communities and families healthy.”¹⁰⁸ The state saved \$32,000 for every youth it moved from Camino Nuevo and plans to re-direct the money to treatment programs.¹⁰⁹ According to New Mexico’s Lieutenant Governor, “We truly do believe that redirection and reprioritizing resources is the only way to change.”¹¹⁰

THE SOLUTION

Close CYA Warehouses, Create Rehabilitation Centers

For California to create an effective, rehabilitative model, it must close the large, outdated CYA prisons. Even during this time of fiscal crisis, California can close facilities and adequately fund a new system if it is smart about its funding priorities and practices.

Other states, such as Utah, have accomplished this with success. According to the former director of the Division of Youth Services in Utah, “[the] budget stayed pretty flat during the transition to the new system. Now [Utah] spend[s] the same number of dollars as before, but [it] serve more kids and serve[s] them better.”¹¹¹ California should pursue the following funding options for transitioning to a new system.

Use Significant Cost-Savings from Reducing the Population

At \$80,000 per youth per year for CYA custody, the state saves significantly each time a youth is diverted to less expensive, and more appropriate, county-level programs. Electronic monitoring, for example, costs only about \$7,000 per year; community-based case-management programs cost even less.¹¹²

Because 52 percent of youth are in CYA for nonviolent offenses,¹¹³ the CYA can cut its population significantly with no impact on public safety. The CYA can reduce the population by reforming the arbitrary process of adding time to youth sentences, allowing for early release with good behavior, stopping over-reliance on incarceration for technical parole violations, and giving counties incentives to keep youth local.

Use Significant Cost-Savings from Closing Facilities

CYA’s own estimates and figures from the Legislative Analyst’s Office indicate significant cost-savings from closing facilities:

- **Closing Paso de Robles** would save almost **\$20 million** in the first fiscal year.¹¹⁴
- **Closing Preston** would save almost **\$23 million** in the first fiscal year.¹¹⁵
- The recent **closure of Nelles** will save an estimated **\$26 million** in the first fiscal year.¹¹⁶

As was the case in many of the states discussed above, California should directly divert savings from closing facilities to regional rehabilitation centers and community-based alternatives.

Use Significant Cost-Savings from Selling Facilities and Land

CYA can save additional funds if it sells the facilities that it closes. For example, selling **Nelles** could save several tens of millions of dollars.¹¹⁷ CYA property can be sold for a number of purposes. In Louisiana, there are plans to transform the Tallulah facility to a community learning center.¹¹⁸

Tap Into Significant Federal Funding Streams

If California moves to a system of smaller, stand-alone, rehabilitation-based centers, the new centers could become eligible for federal matching funds from Medi-Cal and Title IV-E. Missouri uses these funds for many of its residential centers.¹¹⁹ California can be reimbursed 50-75 percent for funds used for planning, data collection, training, case management, counseling, and even transitional housing when youth leave their residential programs. These funds are not available for facilities like those in the current CYA system because of their punitive nature.

By closing its warehouse prisons, California will have the funds it needs to start creating small, local, centers. Since most youth in the CYA are from urban areas, the first centers should be located in or near major cities, such as San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Transitioning to this system does not require new construction costs; Missouri used existing buildings, like former schools, homes, and even a convent.¹²⁰ Additionally, there are numerous empty beds at county camps and ranches due to the declining crime rate.¹²¹ Many of these are built to house 30 youth or less and could be re-modeled to provide a more rehabilitative environment.¹²² The CYA could lease these facilities from counties, providing counties with much-needed revenue.¹²³ Numerous possibilities exist once California makes the commitment to provide youth with the resources and opportunities they need.



Conclusion

The California Youth Authority is an abusive, failed system. It fails to protect public safety, it fails the youth incarcerated in its warehouses, and it fails their families and communities. At the heart of this failure is the CYA's system of large, expensive, obsolete prisons. Experts agree that these warehouses are structurally unsuitable for rehabilitation.

The State can save over \$160 million in the first fiscal year by closing these eight facilities. That money can be reinvested in a functional, effective juvenile justice system that protects children, families, and the public. Surface reforms to the existing facilities are doomed to failure. Even under the guidance of dedicated reformers, other states have been unable to implement a rehabilitative model within prison-

like, warehouse facilities.

Now is the time for California to move to an innovative, effective juvenile justice system. Governor Schwarzenegger's Corrections Independent Review Panel, the Legislative Analyst's Office, and the state's leading juvenile justice experts all support closing facilities as part of this process. Closure of these facilities must be the cornerstone of California's new juvenile justice system.

In California in 2005, warehouse facility closure is economically viable, strategic from a policy perspective, and politically possible. Other states have made this transition to great success. Their recidivism rates have plummeted. Their costs have decreased. California can do the same.



Endnotes

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- ²⁷ *Id.* at 46.
- ²⁸ Corrections Independent Review Panel (2004).
- ²⁹ Lerner (1982) at 60.
- ³⁰ *Id.* at 60.
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- ³² Lerner (1982) at 8.
- ³³ *Id.* at 54.
- ³⁴ Mendel (2003) at 30.
- ³⁵ Lerner (1982) at 18.
- ³⁶ Krisberg (2003) at 69.
- ³⁷ *Id.* at 23.
- ³⁸ Burrell, Sue. Staff Attorney, Youth Law Center. Interview. August 6, 2003.
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- ⁴¹ Mendel (2003) at 30.
- ⁴² Lerner (1982) at 56.
- ⁴³ Cate (2005) at ES-2.
- ⁴⁴ Mendel (2003) at 30.
- ⁴⁵ Hill (2004) at 6.
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¹¹⁶ Legislative Analysts Office. *Analysis of the 2004-05 Budget Bill: Department of the Youth Authority*. (2004).

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¹¹⁸ Maggi, Laura. "House OK's Old Jail for School; Tallulah Site Would be Learning Center." Times-Picayune, June 19, 2004.

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