



May 27, 2020

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th St. Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

The Amador County Board of Supervisors discussed your most recent Budget proposal in the May Revise to close DJJ facilities and realign the rehabilitative services to county care. Our Amador Board is strongly opposed to the closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice that will lead to the closure of Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp in Amador County.

The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) has gone through many transformations over the years. Many of these changes were needed to resolve problems in the youth system and promote efforts to better rehabilitate the youth. The DJJ actually runs quite well now despite the incessant objections of the youth advocacy groups. DJJ has lower population numbers that leads to enhanced treatment and training and a compassionate staff that care about the youth. The cost per ward is high, but when averaged with the significant savings of ward placement at Pine Grove Camp, the overall cost per ward commitment declines.

Amador County sees some merit in your previous decision to move the DJJ to the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS). Your current budget proposal to scrap both the DJJ and the CHHS proposal appears driven more by the COVID-19 emergency and dollars. Your concern should be the appropriate rehabilitation of young people to demonstrate your compassionate stance on behalf of the value and potential of these youth. Counties do not have adequate capacity or resources to design and implement programs for these vulnerable youth. Counties have relied on the State to provide ongoing resources for departments in the past after proposed changes. The money always decreases over time, and what was once a State obligation miraculously becomes a County responsibility with little ongoing support. Amador County has little faith that our State facing a \$54 Billion deficit and a reliance on getting a federal bailout will be able to continue to fund rehabilitation efforts of young people that need a safe, secure environment for their futures and our residents. Your vision and legacy of youth justice reform is more likely to be remembered for more youth receiving adult commitments where they will be exposed to a much greater threat – join the crowd to survive rather than focus on rehabilitation. In addition, dismantling DJJ is complex and will further muddy the waters. Change is sometimes necessary, but creating more uncertainty and anxiety for our youth, their families, and staff during a worldwide pandemic is ill-advised.

Many of the youth that are committed to DJJ are up to 25 years old and already criminally sophisticated. They need a treatment and training environment to stop their negative pathway towards criminality. Many of these youthful offenders are perfect candidates for the Camp program and benefit greatly. They learn job skills; develop a work ethic; provide community service that builds self-

esteem; travel across California fighting fires at considerable savings to the State; earn a GED or high school diploma; and receive vital services to ensure a successful transition back to their communities as part of the continuum of care.

Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp in rural Amador County is near the unincorporated towns of Pine Grove and Volcano. The Camp program has long been regarded as one of the most innovative and successful programs in the country. The young men at Pine Grove Camp have serious commitments. Most acknowledge the distance away from the elements that caused their negative behaviors help them to focus on their change, rehabilitation, and goals. Many of these young men have gone on to have successful careers with CalFire and other fire agencies in California and across the country. All of the Camp wards leave with the skills necessary to succeed and not go back to criminal behavior. All parolees have a lifeline back to the Camp and DJJ personnel who provide support and encouragement. It is noteworthy that in 2010 when youth were tracked on their return to the community the youth had a very high success rate. The recidivism rate for Pine Grove Camp parolees was nearly opposite the negative trend of most CDCR parolees.

By closing DJJ and Pine Grove Camp, a premiere and strategically located fire-fighting arm of CalFire will be eliminated at a time when California faces increasing and catastrophic fire seasons. Cost savings from youth firefighters receiving nominal compensation will be replaced with over 500 professional firefighters (May Revise) at a major cost to the State and meaning astronomical increase to the PERS costs and more unfunded liabilities that are already plaguing our State. Pine Grove Camp youth were deployed to 586 fires across California from 2011-2019. The youth contributed 1,643,216 hours of service on the fireline. Amador-El Dorado Unit Chief Scott Lindgren stated the defensible space activity by Pine Grove Camp wards is critical to the area. Fuel breaks created help to stop fires in Amador County so the fire crews can be deployed elsewhere in the State during fire season.

While the Amador County Board of Supervisors are sympathetic to the State's fiscal position and feel the same impacts in our rural county, we encourage you to look at the bigger picture. The DJJ closure will have a domino effect and hurt rather than help the value and potential of young people to succeed and be productive members of society in the future.

Sincerely,



Patrick Crew
Chairman, Amador County Board of Supervisors

cc: The Honorable Assemblyman Frank Bigelow
The Honorable Senator Andreas Borgeas
Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
California State Assembly, Committee on Budget