

## **SUMMARY OF “SAFETY AND WELFARE PLAN: IMPLEMENTING REFORM IN CALIFORNIA” (MARCH 31, 2006)**

This plan is the product of review by five national experts of the interim Safety and Welfare Remedial Plan. The final Safety and Welfare Plan, filed June 30, 2006, was based on these recommendations. The plan itself is available at <http://www.cya.ca.gov/Communications/DJJReformPlan.html> (Last accessed 7/21/2006).

### **General summary:**

The DJJ currently is plagued by problems, including:

- High levels of violence
- Unsafe conditions for youth and staff
- Antiquated facilities
- An adult corrections mentality with an adult/juvenile mix
- Frequent lockdowns to manage violence
- Lengths of stay almost triple the national average
- Many hours when youth have nothing to do
- Underutilized vocational classroom
- Capitulation to gang culture
- Low levels of staffing and huge living units
- “Abysmal” student achievement despite high spending on education
- Poor re-entry planning and too few parole services

(p. 1)

“California is failing its children. Youth arrive at institutions with serious pre-existing conditions. Many have been abused and neglected, some are mentally ill... Not many youth have the chance of leaving California’s juvenile correctional facilities with their lives turned around. Given what we have seen, no doubt some leave worse off than when they arrived.” (P. 6)

There is widespread violence at DJJ facilities, including youth-on-staff and youth-on-youth. There were 87 medical emergencies due to violence at institutions in FY 2005. The majority of violent incidents were attributed to gang or racial tensions. (Pp. 8-9).

Specifically:

- 34 medical emergencies from youth-on-youth violence
- 53 medical emergencies from youth-on-staff violence
- 145 group disturbances
- 266 incidents of battery of staff by youth
- 84 incidents of youth throwing “foreign substances” (usually feces or urine) at staff
- 80 incidents resulting in lockdowns of multiple youth
- an unknown number of incidents of youth-on-youth violence (DJJ no longer keeps track of youth-on-youth batteries).

#### **Behavior Treatment Program (BTP) - for youth with behavior problems**

- one psychologist for 24 high risk youth (as per the DJJ Safety and Welfare Plan) is not enough to provide for individual therapy, group therapy, case conferences, and treatment team meetings. Another part-time psychologist must be added. (P. 61)

- The Safety and Welfare Plan of twenty-four residents per housing unit for youth with problem behavior is too many. The American Correctional Association calls for no more than 16 beds, and some states have units of 10 or fewer. Until the DJJ can construct replacement institutions, the units should be subdivided. (P. 62)

#### **Substance Abuse Treatment**

- 80% of wards have substance abuse needs (p.66)

#### **Sexual Behavior Treatment**

- At least 8% of male DJJ residents under age 18 and 11.5% of males age 18 and over are legally required to have sexual behavior treatment. (P. 67)

## **Disciplinary System**

- DJJ's institutions have adopted an adult corrections model that employs punishment as the sole means of behavior modification. "The research literature is clear – punishment is the least effective form of behavior modification...In fact, it has been shown that punishment actually increases negative behavior." (P. 74)

- Five of the eight DJJ facilities lack a disciplinary coordinator, leading to inconsistency, inadequate monitoring, and poor documentation.

- The absence of an intact, functioning disciplinary process at a single institution should be cause for alarm. Its absence at a majority of institutions is unconscionable. In a system plagued with conflict and problem behavior, providing for a well-run disciplinary process founded on due process principles should be a top priority." (P. 74)