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PUBLIC SAFETY | DAILY REPORT

Budget cuts could send young offenders to adult prisons

January 20, 2011 | [David Gross](#) and [Michael Montgomery](#)

Gov. Jerry Brown's bid to abolish the state youth prison system could save hundreds of millions of dollars and quicken the pace of reform at county facilities. But the changes could remove important barriers that keep some juvenile offenders out of adult prisons.

Brown's plan to close the Division of Juvenile Justice was part of drastic budget cuts he presented last week. If the budget is enacted, the division would stop accepting new wards and close by June 30, 2014, with any remaining offenders transferred to local jurisdictions. The state would save \$250 million once the plan is fully implemented, according to the governor's office.

The changes would do more than simply shift costs and responsibilities from Sacramento to the counties for California's most dangerous and gang-entrenched youth. Fewer than 1,500 wards remain in decaying, expensive youth correctional facilities that some refer to as "gladiator schools."

Supporters of the measure say closing the state facilities will improve treatment for young offenders while reducing costs.

"Now that people can be close to home, it will offer great opportunity for family healing and community healing," said Jakada Imani, executive director of the Ella Baker Center.

"The counties have much better practices. There is a shorter chain of accountability at a local level. We've been pushing for this for years. It is an idea whose time has time."

Daniel Macallair, executive director of Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, said the current system of state-run youth prisons is unsustainable.

"You can't justify spending \$234,000 per kid each year on a system that is essentially broken while cutting funding for child care subsidies, higher education and depriving disabled people. You have to make choices somewhere."

"By getting rid of DJJ, we can focus our time, attention and resources on the county systems and not be consumed by an old system that is long past its service," Macallair said.

But other experts opposed to the plan said the closure would come at a price.

Barry Krisberg of the Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice said the state still needs a small facility for older, gang-entrenched youth. His concern is that even if the closure doesn't immediately send more juvenile offenders to adult lock-ups, the end result could be the same if counties can't take up the slack.

"It is a difficult population, in terms of violence and serious sex offenses," he said. "It is my view that the counties are not equipped to adequately provide for these youth. One consequence is we will push more of them into the (adult) prison system."

Krisberg also worries that some counties may prosecute more juveniles as adults to cope with the hand-off from the state system, sending tougher cases to adult prisons.

David Steinhart of the juvenile justice program at Commonwealth said there's already a trend in that direction, with the number of juveniles tried as adults doubling in California between 2004 and 2009.

"The adult system will have to open new space for kids," Steinhart said.

But David Macallair said that while there has been a rise in juveniles tried as adults, they are not heading to adult prisons prior to reaching adulthood.

"Even though those cases are being direct-filed in adult court, the youth are ending up in county systems. Judges are not sending them to the dysfunctional adult system," Macallair said.



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Lois Rodriguez, of Riverbank, said her son, Kraig Palacio, was tried for a gang-related crime as an adult but is serving time in a state youth correctional facility. Rodriguez said she had to fight hard to keep her son out of adult prison.

"I fought for ... getting him placed here instead of prison, that was my biggest thing," Rodriguez said. "I was lucky that his lawyer, his third lawyer that we got, went along with it."

"These kids are being tried as an adult, and they're being thrown in the prison system. They're being institutionalized. It's sad, it's really sad."

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impoundguy

January 20, 2011

Maybe if the Juv'i's saw they might be spending time with Bubba as their new "friend in jail" they might think twice about committing crimes that they now serve out in some "facility" that is probably only one step down or equal to their homes.



brian in oakland

January 20, 2011

Here is an idea: Let's invest in what actually works. DJJ doesn't. Sending kids to adult prisons doesn't. Actually showing them their full potential DOES. invest in counties to better rehabilitate these kids so they can become better contributors to society. Thank you too all who do this work.



rongascin

March 11, 2011

I totally agree with Brian in Oakland. They system is broken! The following are facts! A child can be caught bringing drugs to school on 3 seperate occasions before he actually answers to a judge who feels no child should have a record so he gives him 10 hours of drug counseling! He can also be picked up by the cops smoking pot, having illegal fireworks, carrying a knife, only for the officer to tell him to call someone to come get him out of there and then does not even verify if it is a parent or not! The child can also steal a car under the influence of pot cause a hit and run accident and only gets probation! Then they are shocked that the child thought it was ok to carry a gun and use it if he/she felt necessary and now they are locked up! Well the way I see it the system showed the child just how easy it was to get away with things. Had the child had real consequences on several different occasions they might not be where they are now! Please don't blame it on the parent either if you don't know the circumstances. The family court system failed them too!

via Twitter

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David Chura

Budget cuts could send young offenders to adult prisons | California Watch <http://t.co/3bW2FH8>
Friday, January 21, 2011, 5:12:01 PM from [Twitter](#)



Roth Childs

RT @solitarywatch: Budget cuts could send young offenders to adult prisons | California Watch <http://goo.gl/IVRCe>



Number of children with parent in prison growing



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@[GlennBackes](#) please watch and retweet http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g008TpXY7ds&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

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Ella Baker Center

"It is an idea whose time has time." Jakada Imani. More news & views on the possible closing of the DJJ: <http://bit.ly/fXh9eN> [booksnotbars](#)

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P. Mimi Poinsett MD

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