

April 12, 2023

Dear Board of State and Community Corrections,

My name is Stacy Nunez, I am an education attorney with the Youth Justice Education Clinic (“YJEC”). YJEC represents cross-over youth with Special Education needs. This includes juvenile justice involved youth, whether they are on probation or detained in the halls. I currently represent several clients who are detained in Barry J Nidorf and Central Juvenile Hall. From what my clients share that they experience on a day-to-day basis, one thing is clear: the juvenile halls are beyond reform. Today I urge you, on behalf of my clients and all youth currently detained in the halls, that you vote to shut down Central and Barry J Nidorf and that as many youths as possible be released and sent home immediately.

During the peak of COVID, a state of emergency was declared, and youth were released because it was determined that sending them home was the best solution during such a crisis. The current circumstances warrant the same level of urgency. Young people at Central and Barry J Nidorf are in crisis. The long-standing, deplorable state of the juvenile halls calls for nothing less than a state of emergency. As was previously done, youth who are pre-disposition or who have committed low level offenses should be released immediately.

Releasing youth in conjuncture with closing the halls is necessary to prevent another catastrophe, like the one that occurred last March when all youth from Central were moved into Barry J Nidorf, from occurring. Moving hundreds of young people into a single facility that did not have enough space to safely house them, appropriate educate them, or could provide programming to appropriately meet their needs, was a complete failure that should have never occurred. Creating another hostile situation for young people who are already trying to survive in such unsuitable conditions would be unconscionable.

The poor state of the juvenile halls is a result of ongoing, systemic issues that cannot be remedied with short-term, quick “fixes.” No amount of Probation staff increase will appropriately address the toxic culture that has festered and perpetuated violence within the halls. The Probation department has been given far too many opportunities to attempt to remedy the situation and have shown time and time again that it is not capable of providing the support these young people need to truly heal and reenter their communities. This is the optimal time to defund Probation and instead fund actual solutions that contribute to healthy and holistic youth development. This is the time to reduce the population of detained youth and ensure that communities have the resources they need to care for their youth at home.

Thank you for your attention to this matter in such a critical time.

Respectfully,

Stacy Nuñez. Esq.
Youth Justice Education Clinic