

Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission

Annual Report 2016

BACKGROUND

Section 225 of the Welfare and Institutions Code requires each county in the State of California to have a Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC). The role of the commission is set forth in Sections 229, 230, 270, and 271 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. Each commission is enjoined to inquire into the administration of juvenile justice in its county.

The law mandates that the Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission inspect Juvenile Hall and all institutions used by the county for the confinement of minors and report its findings annually to the Juvenile Court and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

The commission consists of between seven and fifteen members appointed by the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge. Commissioners are not paid for their services to the county.

MISSION STATEMENT AND DUTIES

The mission of the Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission is to advocate for and protect the safety and well-being of dependent and delinquent youth in Sonoma County.

Commission responsibilities include:

- Inspecting juvenile facilities including detention facilities and group homes used for the placement of minors in Sonoma County.
- Conducting investigations into complaints brought to the commission concerning the welfare of children in the Juvenile Justice System.
- Conducting hearings on matters relating to juvenile law in Sonoma County.
- Advocating for needed services for youth in the justice system.

2016 – 2017 COMMISSIONERS:

Gayle Ballinger
Cathy Brooks
Michael Charpiot
Mary Cone
Gina Crozier
Jody Edwards
Robert Faux
Michael Fried
Eve Goldberg
Jane Person
Dennis Ruggiero
Edy Ullman

INSPECTIONS

As the commission is mandated by law to inspect any jail or lockup within the county that is used for the confinement of minors and report the results to the Juvenile Court, the Juvenile Justice Commission conducts annual inspections of Juvenile Hall, the Probation Camp and Valley of the Moon Children's Home. Additionally, for each of these three facilities commissioners review incident reports on a monthly basis.

The Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission also annually inspects group homes housing dependent or delinquent juveniles within the county and reports the results to the Juvenile Court, the Probation Department, Community Care Licensing, respective facility director, and CA Board of State & Community Corrections.

Normally two commissioners conduct inspections of group homes. Facilities are notified in advance that they will be inspected on a designated date and are required to fill out a pre-inspection report prior to the Commissioner's visit. This form contains relevant information such as the number and ages of youth served, average stay, staff training requirements, grievance procedures, etc.

The actual inspection includes a session with administrative staff, house staff and private interviews with house residents. Emphasis is placed on overall facility condition, adequacy, comfort and cleanliness of accommodations. Commissioners look into safety procedures, educational and recreational opportunities maintenance of the facility, and anything else relevant to the fair and safe treatment of the youth.

During the calendar year 2016, one or more commission members inspected the following group homes:

- Greenacre Homes
- Hanna Boys Center
- Plumfield
- R House
- Crossroads Sierra Girls' Center
- TLC Child and Family Services
- Victor Treatment Center
- Valley of the Moon Children's Home

Additionally, commissioners inspected the following:

- Sebastopol Police Station
- Sonoma County Crisis Stabilization Unit

These reports can be found on our website at:

www.juvenilejusticecommission.org

Adult Court for Juveniles:

- Commissioners were present at the adult court holding facility location for Juveniles being tried as adults, and wrote a report with two concerns. First, there is no separate entrance designated for juveniles with appearances in Adult Court. Second, separation of adult and juvenile inmates in the courtroom might be better accomplished by holding all juvenile appearances first, before the arrival of adult inmates.

SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

Investigations prompted by phone calls or email

This year the commission received a few complaints from the community which were investigated by a committee of commissioners. One complaint had to do with the possible abuse of a child by staff at Valley of the Moon Children's Home. This complaint was addressed by forwarding the individual to the appropriate agencies. Another call was from a youth at Juvenile Hall. This situation was investigated and handled by the Juvenile Hall Director.

Academic Awards for Youth

The commission presents a certificate and annual cash honorariums to youth in Juvenile Hall and the Probation Camp who have earned their GED, High School Diploma, or Certificate for High School Completion. Six youth were presented

with these at Juvenile Hall in 2016. When possible, the awards were made to the individuals in person by a commissioner and, if possible, in the presence of the youth's family and peers. This year the commission decided to expand these honorariums to include group home residents as well, beginning with the 2016-17 school year.

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE YEAR 2016

- Recruitment of New Commissioners: The commission had several candidates who applied as a result of newspaper advertisements and three were selected to join. We actively pursued a youth member and in fact changed the four year commissioner requirement to accept a commitment of two years if we can locate a youth to fill the position. Over the year we did receive two youth applications; one did not show up to the scheduled interview twice and the other declined due to misunderstanding the responsibilities of the commission.
- The commission accepted resignations of Jim Weathers and Richard Miller, and welcomed new commissioners: Cathy Brooks, Eve Goldberg, Michael Fried, and Jane Person who bring a wealth of experience and knowledge. Our total of 12 commissioners is the most we have had in several years.
- The commission participated in the required nomination of the county's new Chief Probation Officer.
- AB 403: In January 2016, the commission sent a letter expressing our concern about the state policy changes as they relate to the Continuum of Care Reform and the continued need for quality residential care (see attached).
 - This letter was sent to: California Governor Jerry Brown; California Assemblymen; the presiding judge of Juvenile Court in each county; the Board of Supervisors in each County; Jennifer Rodriguez, Youth Law Center; Michael Krasny, KQED Forum Program; Joaquin Sabien, ProPublica; Michael Minor, Deputy Director Division of Juvenile Justice (CA); Robert Ochs, Chief of Probation (Sonoma County); Pauline Muntzer, Community Care Licensing (Sonoma County); Allison Gantner, Deputy Director, CA BSCC; Leslie Heller, Field Representative, CA BSCC; Nick Honey, Division Director, Sonoma County FYCD; Sonoma County Juvenile Court Judges; Directors of Group Homes in Sonoma County; and all the Chairs of Juvenile Justice Commissions (JJC) or Juvenile Justice Delinquency & Prevention Commissions (JJDPC) in California.

- Responses to this letter included calls from the Sonoma County Chief Probation Robert Ochs and Nick Honey, Division Director Sonoma County FYCD. Mr. Honey went further and wrote a letter to us where he committed to engage in discussion with the commission relating to these concerns.
- We also heard from several chairs of JJC's throughout the state who applauded our advocacy efforts and encouraged continued communications among CA JJC & JJDPCs.
- We also were able to publish a shortened version of this letter in the Press Democrat, "Close to Home" section.
- As of January 1, 2017, AB 403 will eliminate the function of group homes and replace them with Short Term Residential Treatment Programs (STRTPs). As a result, the group homes in Sonoma County, as well as others throughout the State, are in the process of converting from group home status to STRTPs. Under existing law, in Section 229.5 W&I Code, California Juvenile Justice Commissions have the authority to inspect the operations of group homes. AB 403 failed to provide for continuing inspection authority to be applied to the new STRTPs. The commission wrote proposed amendments to the W&I Code with language that allows JJC to inspect Short Term Residential Treatment Centers. We worked early in the year with State Senator Mike McGuire's office to enable this, and while they promised the proposed changes would go forward for passage and signing by the Governor, due to last minute emergencies and changes, it was dropped. In November we sent another letter to Senator McGuire. This time we also sent a copy to all those in attendance at our workshop first time this is mentioned in this paper with a recommendation for them to send it on to their own representative.
- The commission wanted to understand directly from group homes in Sonoma County what they viewed as to their future in light of AB403 after January 2017. We received responses from seven of the eight group homes in the county. The responses clarified some of the issues. We learned that there are diverse issues, levels of acceptance and frustration as group homes prepare for implementation of the new law. Concern with the new law's potential negative effect on children was universal. A small number of agencies are exploring increasing services to ensure a solid transition between the group home placement and the next placement in family based care. The commission will be repeating the survey and comparing anticipated effects to actual implementation outcomes in June 2017. We gave the group homes an open invitation to advise us and provide feedback about the impact of this new law.

- The Commission worked to form a statewide linkage of JJC's and JJDPC's. We created an email listing of each JJC chair and as many individual members as possible throughout California. We then made this distribution list available to all.
- Sonoma County JJC hosted a statewide one-day conference inviting all JJC/JJDPC in the state to discuss issues and share information. 47 participants from 20 counties attended the JJC workshop on Saturday, November 5, 2016. All were pleased to come together and there was much talk about what we could do related to youth advocacy if we worked together.
- Inbound Education: The commission continues to educate all members to ensure we are knowledgeable about juvenile justice issues in the county. Speakers over the course of the year included:
 - Nick Honey, Department of Social Services;
 - Ron Halverson Research & Program Development Manager, Sonoma County Probation Department: Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan together with 6 panelists who represent the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council for Sonoma County;
 - State of California Department of Social Services Angela Carmack, Regional Manager, Community Care Licensing Division, Children's Residential Program;; Glenn Schnell, Licensing Program Manager, Community Care Licensing; Pauline Muntzer and Megan Mullen, Licensing Program Analysts for Marin, Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino Counties;
 - Commissioners also attended conferences offered by local private and county agencies throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted on December 11, 2016 by

Mary Cone

2015-2016 Chairperson

Dennis Ruggiero

2016-2017 Chairperson

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