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November 20, 2024

Board of State and Community Corrections
2590 Venture Oaks Way
Sacramento, CA 95833

Re: Unsuitability of Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall

Dear Board,

We write again to demand that the Board of State and Community Corrections perform its legal duty and reject the Los Angeles Probation Department's transparently false claim that Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall can be made suitable for the confinement of minors before December 12th. Both the Board and the Los Angeles Probation Department have been down this road before; the Board finds one of Los Angeles' juvenile halls out of compliance with regulations, the Department cynically takes unsustainable actions and provides false documentation to prove it has come back into compliance for a short period of time, and the Board agrees to restart the compliance process. This time should be different. For the compliance process enshrined in Welfare and Institutions Code section 209 to have any practical effect, the Board must stop allowing the Los Angeles Probation Department to embarrass it with these blatant manipulations. Fortunately, due to the lack of an approved Corrective Action Plan, the only thing the Board needs to do to finally end the Los Angeles Probation Department's contemptuous undermining of WIC § 209 is refrain from further action. When the Los Angeles Probation Department inevitably asks the Board to send staff inspectors to

reverse the Board’s declaration of Los Padrinos’ unsuitability, the Board should explain that a finding of suitability can only be made at a public meeting of the full Board and there are no scheduled meetings before December 12th on which the issue can be agendized. The Board’s role in ensuring compliance with state standards at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall is done.

There is overwhelming evidence that the Los Angeles Probation Department cannot bring Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall into compliance with state regulations for any significant period of time. The most convincing evidence is that of the BSCC’s own inspectors who have found Los Padrinos noncompliant with at least one regulation for thirteen months out of the seventeen months it has been open, including six of the eight months following the Board’s April 2024 decision not to shut the facility down. These findings are consistent with the recent findings of the Los Angeles Probation Oversight Commission, who reports to this Board that it has found “overpopulation, violence, and volatility in some units,” “insufficient programming and inaccurate schedules,” and “disorganized and inconsistent approaches to supervision and facility planning.”¹ Just yesterday, California Attorney General Rob Bonta issued a public statement stating that it had received “alarming reports from an independent monitor about the continued deterioration of conditions at... Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.”²

This is not new, and we have seen the Department’s inadequate plans to address these problems before. There is consensus that Los Padrinos’ fundamental problem is that too few staff reliably report to duty to suitably confine upwards of 300 youth. The Department has again promised to address this by assigning field staff to the facility, encouraging staff to show up, and hiring enough officers to maintain compliance. However, all of these have been tried before. The Department has also recently begun taking steps to reduce the population, but those steps will not reduce the population

¹ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission, *2024 Annual Inspection Report: Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall*, at pp. 1-2. Available at <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/POC24-0125.pdf>

² Rob Bonta, *Attorney General Bonta Announces Additional Monitoring, Strengthened Protections for Youth in Los Angeles County Juvenile Halls*. Available at <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-bonta-announces-additional-monitoring-strengthened-protections>

nearly enough to alleviate the staffing crises and certainly will not do so by December 12th.

These are not technical problems that Board members can comfortably overlook. A “culture of violence” has developed at Los Padrinos.³ The day after the Board found Los Padrinos suitable in April 2024, the Los Angeles Times reported on a fight club organized by staff.⁴ Inspectors find that youth in understaffed units “live with a constant threat of violence,” where “many youth appeared to have violence-related injuries” with bruised faces or with their arms in casts or slings.⁵ At the Los Angeles Probation Oversight Commission’s most recent public meeting, held just last week, Stacy Ford, President of AFSCME Local 685, went so far as to state about Los Padrinos, “Right now it's like a warzone... our members are not feeling that they're safe, they're not feeling protected.”⁶ Youth are pepper sprayed an average of one to two times per day.⁷ Understaffing at Los Padrinos has made it an unacceptably dangerous place.

Accordingly, we urge the Board to allow Welfare and Institutions Code section 209 to play out without further action by the Board. The Board has no duty to play along with the Los Angeles Probation Department’s bad-faith efforts to undermine WIC § 209. The Board has already fulfilled its duties by inspecting Los Padrinos, notifying the Los Angeles Probation Department of noncompliance, reviewing and denying the Department’s Corrective Action Plan, and giving notice to all persons having authority to confine juveniles in Los Padrinos that the facility is not being operated and maintained as a suitable place for the confinement of juveniles. The Board is not required by statute or

³ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission, *2024 Annual Inspection Report: Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, supra*, at pp. 1-2.

⁴ James Queally and Rebecca Ellis, *Video shows L.A. probation officers letting group beat teen in Los Padrinos juvenile hall*, Los Angeles Times, April 12, 2024. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-04-12/video-shows-l-a-probation-officers-letting-group-beat-teen-in-los-padrinos-juvenile-hall>

⁵ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission, *2024 Annual Inspection Report: Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, supra*, at p. 5.

⁶ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission, *November 14, 2024 Meeting Video*. Available at <https://poc.lacounty.gov/meetings/>

⁷ Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission, *Dashboard*. Available at <https://poc.lacounty.gov/dashboard/>

by the procedures the Board adopted at its July 11, 2024 meeting to do anything else. In fact, because Los Padrinos' suitability is not on the BSCC's November 21st meeting agenda, there is nothing the Board can do at this time. Furthermore, findings of suitability and unsuitability, if not made by operation of law, can be made only by the Board and not unilaterally by staff. Legally, it is a *fait accompli* that starting December 13, 2024, Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall shall not be used for confinement of juveniles.

Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the Los Angeles Probation Department will request that the Board send staff to reinspect for compliance between now and December 12th. The Board should decline to do that for two reasons. First, as written above, only the Board can find that Los Padrinos has become suitable again. Second, and more fundamentally, the Board should not allow itself to continue being a willing dupe for Los Angeles' efforts to confine youth in an unsuitable facility. That the BSCC cannot reverse Los Padrinos' unsuitability at this late date should be made clear to the public and to the Los Angeles Probation Department at the BSCC's November 21 meeting.

Finally, to avoid repetition of the problems that have plagued this process with Los Angeles, the Board should make clear to inspectors and probation departments that an issue of noncompliance is remedied only when the remedy includes new and substantial policies and practices that will sustainably remedy conditions for the foreseeable future. Temporary fixes should not be enough. This should be written into a revision of the Board's July 11, 2024 Corrective Action Plan Process. Hopefully, that will help ensure that other facilities do not follow Los Angeles' lead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SGL', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sean Garcia-Leys, Esq.
Co-Executive Director,
The Peace and Justice Law Center