



## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

October 2024

### **Youth Justice Action Month**

California joins the nation in recognizing Youth Justice Action Month and lifting up the importance of creating a fair and equitable youth justice system for the future of our state. California has taken significant steps to reform youth incarceration, based on research that shows that youth involved in the justice system who remain under the care of their local county are more prepared for their transition back into their community and for achieving their educational, career and life goals.

Backed by a wide-ranging coalition of state and local partners, educational experts and advocates for juvenile justice reform, I signed legislation in 2020 outlining the state's profound shift away from the punitive youth incarceration of the past and toward providing young individuals with opportunities for personal growth and success, especially for young people of color who are overrepresented in California's justice system.

SB 823 initiated the closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice and created the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) – dedicated to promoting trauma responsive, culturally-informed services – to assist counties as youth are supported closer to their communities and families. In June of 2023, the last youths in the Division of Juvenile Justice were transferred back to their communities for care and rehabilitation.

In partnership with the Legislature, we enacted legislation in 2022 to make the Youth Bill of Rights applicable to youth in juvenile justice facilities. This action helps empower youth and their families to advocate for protections and rights related to their living conditions, education, family contact, and more. The Youth Bill of Rights is a foundational document for the OYCR Ombudsperson, who can investigate and resolve complaints about the violation of youth rights or harmful practices in local facilities. Building on this, I signed SB 1353 (Wahab) this year, which adds to the Youth Bill of Rights the right to not be deprived of mental health resources.

Last year, California became the first state in the nation approved to offer a targeted set of Medicaid services to youth and eligible adults in state prisons, county jails, and youth correctional facilities for up to 90 days prior to release, helping to provide continuity of coverage for individuals as well as access to key services to help them successfully return to their communities.

California is also prioritizing education for systems-involved youth by providing block grants for county offices of education to support juvenile court schools and youth engaged in alternative education. Through the Rising Scholars Network, youth in detention settings across 45 facilities are able to access higher education. Fifty of California's community colleges have also been authorized to join the network, creating even more opportunities.

OYCR recently launched a Youth Advisory Board comprised of young people who have lived experience with juvenile justice policies. Their unique insights will help to bring youth voices to the center of California's juvenile justice work. And this November, OYCR will host the first California Youth Justice Summit to bring together policy advocates, law enforcement partners, youth, educators, behavioral health professionals and community members to discuss ways to better serve youth involved in the justice system and improve outcomes.

This month, I encourage all Californians to learn about the state's transformative efforts to advance youth justice to help all our young people thrive and support a brighter future for our state.

Sincerely,

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

Gavin Newsom