



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES PROBATION COMMISSION
9150 EAST IMPERIAL HIGHWAY
DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA 90242
(562) 940-2754



Joe Gardner
President

DATE: August 2, 2018

To: Chief Deputy Sheila Mitchell,
Deputy Director Dave Mitchell
Probation Camp Director Katheryn Beigh
Commission President Joseph Gardner
cc: Nancy Aspurian, Justice Deputy, Third District
Lisa Pinto, Children's Deputy, Third District
Carol Biondi, Children and Families Commissioner, Third District
From: Jacqueline Caster, Probation Commissioner, Third District
RE: May 18th Visit to Campus Kilpatrick and follow up calls through July 30th

There are currently serious problems with the implementation of the L.A. Model at Campus Kilpatrick (CK). In national juvenile justice circles, experts are increasingly aware of the Los Angeles Probation Department's inability to operate the facility with basic adherence or fidelity toward its own carefully-developed plans. This is now a topic of grave concern which they will continue to monitor.

Without a change in course, this facility may soon join all the existing Los Angeles County Probation camps with historically poor performances.

The creation of the L.A. Model was inspired by the Missouri Model. I had been involved with CK since its inception, having brought the Missouri Model to the County's attention and organized a large delegation from L.A. to visit Kansas City in 2009 to learn about it firsthand. Along with Children and Families Commissioner Carol Biondi, I was actively involved with the multi-agency camp design and building, spending multiple years on planning teams to make the project become reality, supporting Commissioner Biondi as she led the State funding and advocacy efforts, and also served on the "Team of Twelve".

Commissioner Biondi and I visited CK on May 18, 2018 to learn firsthand what was actually occurring. The visit ran from approximately 1:45 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. On June 4th, I also had an extensive phone conversation with Mark Steward, the architect of the Missouri Model. His consulting firm, Missouri Youth Services Institute, is still working directly with L.A. County Probation, despite great frustration. I also followed up with a phone call to staff at CK for

some additional information on July 12th and again with department leadership on July 27th and 30th

This report includes my findings and conclusions.

Population of Youth at CK

The day of our visit, there were 22 youth on campus with 11 per unit. From 2011 until the present, experts have advised that in any Missouri Model-inspired facility, 8 is actually the ideal size, with 9 the absolute maximum. As a key goal of the L.A. Model is to build small relationship-based cohort groups, the staff have reported that placing 10 or more youths in a group has indeed made it extremely difficult to achieve any cohesiveness. This finding supports the conclusion drawn by probation departments in various jurisdictions nationally which have implemented Missouri-system models.

However, group size is not the only serious issue regarding CK's population. During our visit, Camp Director Katheryn Beigh informed us there were currently 6 young men on heavy doses of psychotropic medications (although various staff reported the number might actually be slightly higher). On June 21st, in a follow up call to staff, it was confirmed that 8 (and possibly 9) youth currently were on medications due to their being "extremely difficult to manage." In a population of 22 youth, this represented roughly 40%.

Upon further follow up on July 30th, I was informed the number on serious psychotropic medications had dropped to 4. However, when speaking with Deputy Director of Residential Treatment Services, David Mitchell, I was informed that with the closing of Camp Challenger its many kids with serious mental health issues will be transferred among all the remaining camps, and CK will be treated no differently than the other facilities. So, the expectation is that the number will rise again.

The implementation plan published in January 2017 ("Culture of Care for All: Envisioning the L.A. Model") allows for inclusion of youths with mental health issues and even those on some psychotropic drugs. However, if their known behavior or behavior after arrival warrants serious care by trained mental health staff and a staff psychiatrist, such youth are not appropriate for placement at CK. In order to prevent this situation in the future, decision-making regarding the disposition of such youth must be moved to skilled mental health experts. Staff at CK agree this change is immediately necessary as the inappropriate assignment of such youth has had serious implications for staff functioning and morale.

Several staff members described how their initial excitement of working at CK with its therapeutic approach has now dimmed as they see the facility succumbing by necessity to the practices associated with other "old model" Probation camps, as well as its slide into functioning as a de factor mental health facility. One CK staff member noted, "Kirby would make more sense

for these boys since everyone has direct access to an MSW and there is a full-time psychiatrist on campus.”

In addition to the extensive use of psychotropic medications, staff confirmed that between 15-20 youth receive nighttime sleep medications which cause drowsiness during school hours and throughout the day. This practice interferes with the L.A. Model’s goal of academic achievement. It also digresses from fidelity to the Missouri Model. By July 30th, the number had dropped to 13, however this was still a full third of the population. But the real concern will be the impending influx of former Challenger youth which is bound to increase this number dramatically.

We also learned that over half of CK’s youths are considered “severe special education youth”; yet, at the time of our visit, there was not a single special education teacher on staff. This is unfortunate, as the school is resourced with advanced technology academic programs that these young men cannot access. Also, just like the Probation staff, the teaching staff are unable to focus upon the others who could most benefit from the offerings, since the special needs youth require constant direction. This is yet another obstacle to achieving the designated goal of promoting academic advancement. In fact, when we spoke with them, several youths who the staff later identified as special-education pupils firmly expressed their discomfort and lack of skill with computers, adding that they greatly prefer paper and pencil.

Since the County team visit to Kansas City in 2009, expert reports, including those written specifically for Los Angeles county, all insist that implementation of any Missouri-type approach should target youth who are motivated to change and most capable of working in a group setting. They state that if not implemented with full fidelity, these programs will simply not work. One CK staff observed, “In the long-run, it makes more financial sense to do this with the appropriate and right number of youth. The County has spent so much on this place, why not do it correctly as they continue to shell out more dollars to operate it?”

The alternate view at the top levels of Probation appears to be that given the enormous expense to build and operate CK, the empty beds are wasted and better off filled by “someone” no matter whom. But this strategy is neither cost effective nor transformative in terms of youth. These practices will prevent this carefully planned project to produce the positive outcomes that had been anticipated.

Data Collection/Evaluation

It is notable that Chief Deputy of Juvenile Services, Sheila Mitchell, has stated that the program evaluation by NCCD began on CK’s opening day. However, we have learned from CK staff that the evaluation is still in a planning stage. Additionally, some staff report that many youths from the first cohort to exit CK have already been re-incarcerated. But since no data has been provided

from the Department, there is no way to know how the program failed them and what part of the program is ineffective. This raises concerns about the Department's inability to follow its own directives for the new L.A. Model - that it be data-driven.

Shortage of Staff

CK's planners, justifiably, did not anticipate a lack of adequate staffing. However, in reality, staff shortages have had severe implications for the facility. The group sessions that represent the core of the LA Model have been cancelled because of the increased need for staff presence to supervise classrooms for mental health youth. Staff reported that other than Circle Up and Circle Down and some Dialectical Behavioral Therapy ("DBT"), the groups are either not convening enough or at all; because of this, the group has no impact. The shortage of staff has also resulted in exhaustion as staff have neither time for breaks nor time to discuss individual cases among themselves.

The 56 hour shifts staff assigned have proven problematic with too many consecutive hours, which add to staff exhaustion. Additionally, the consolidation of days leads to a lack of consistent leadership for group sessions which - not surprisingly -- weakens group cohesiveness. With only two and half days per week with the youth, critical relationship building is impossible.

Another ramification of the staff shortage is the delay in bringing in new groups. During our May 18th visit, there were 22 youth in the existing cohort on campus (2 groups of 11), with plans underway for 22 additional youth in the next cohort. But as of 6/21, only one new group of 11 had arrived, instead of 2 as had been planned. This is linked directly to staff shortages: there simply are not enough staff to train to oversee an additional group right now. As of July 30th, the population of youth in camp was still at 33 (plus 2 others assigned to CK, but not physically on campus.)

All of these observations directly contradict one of the L.A. Model's goals - to promote staff wellbeing and prioritize their roles as mentors. Additionally, CK Supervisor and Acting Assistant Director, Tommy Baines, was a valued mentor and role model to youth and staff alike. He was committed to broadening his impact guiding Probation youth and sought to promote within

the Department ranks. Once he was actually promoted, however, it was into the adult division – an assignment that has baffled and disappointed many of his colleagues, not to mention the youth who had been under his care.

Change in Therapeutic Methods

Staff report that every day they intend to use the Circle Up and Circle Down sessions to help “center” their groups. These programs enable discussions of individual challenges, as well as issues within the group dynamics. But, in reality, the key therapeutic tool used at CK is DBT.

While staff members do concur that DBT has some benefits, they state that it is too formulaic and lacks the interactions that foster personal growth. While definitely a key element in both the L.A. and Missouri Models, these sessions are meant to then lead to *more organic group meetings/discussions which are at the true heart of these models and where real progress is made*. Staff report that CK is devoid of such intense, personal group sessions which enable youth to work together through interpersonal issues and, ultimately become comfortable enough to share their individual problems openly.

A related concern is the length of stay at CK, with youth typically staying only 5 months which staff and other experts agree is not enough time for behavioral change that can be sustained. Experts posit this process takes at least 7 months, with youth being allowed to go home on monitored weekends at the end of that to help ease their reentry. This practice is common in other jurisdictions nationally. In Missouri, the typical length of stay is 9-12 months.

Lack of Programs and Rewards

There is very limited programming during non-school hours, contrary to what was anticipated in the “Culture of Care for All” document. Youth shared that they spend most of the non-school hours sitting around. Staff members report that these are the most dangerous periods with high risk of fights erupting among youth. In particular, CK does not employ the type of behavior modification (reward) programming that was so carefully planned for this facility and is a key element of the Missouri system’s success with rewards for meeting the levels. At CK, there are no rewards. As a result, staff recently took it upon themselves to arrange an outing for Level 4 at no cost and paid out of pocket for McDonalds meals for all participants. Staff frequently pay out of pocket for rewards and are unreimbursed. This is unacceptable.

The very limited programming that is available, aside from DBT, consists of Arts for Incarcerated Youth (AIY) whose resident artists are present almost daily. Every Saturday a dance group performs. There is a planned DMH-run 12-week drug rehab group. Unfortunately, this is far from enough. Many staff lament that high quality and popular enrichment programs such as Cee-Hope – and others outlined in the LA model program plan – are not available at CK.

Severe Need for More Outdoor Recreational Space

Along with lack of programming, boredom can be linked to the lack of outdoor recreation space. With the razing of Camp Miller, CK staff want to utilize its abandoned space for playing fields and a garden. At the time of our visit and in our follow up calls, leadership reported that they have requested this repeatedly from both Chief Sheila Mitchell and Deputy Chief Dave Mitchell, with no clear responses. This, plus the lack of adequate non-athletic programming, trigger acting out and violence that has broken out at the facility (youth on youth and youth on staff).

On a positive note, the refurbished pool opened in early June.

Parent Involvement

Not all of the visit focused on critiques. Staff noted that DMH is doing a great job with family therapy. Additionally, the school has a PTA which meets on Sundays. Most of the youths' parents have attended and have also received DBT training at CK.

However, parental involvement remains inconsistent. For the cohort of 22 youth in residence (before the next 11 were added in June), roughly 5 have parents who have attended special events. About 4-11 youth have had a family member come to see them on visiting days, and about a third of the young men have had a visitor on a non-visiting day. The facility provides transportation for them as parents/guardians.

Miscellaneous Staff Quotes

"They have done a good job picking the staff overall, but **some** staff are not well-trained to do this work"

"So many of the youth should not be in camp at all. They're there for very low-level offenses."

"The aftercare and wrap around services from DMH are great!"

Comments from Campus Kilpatrick Youth:

All the youth complained of great boredom, stating that there is very little in the way of programming or athletic activities available. Much of their down time is just spent "sitting around". One added that he would like to have more time to spend just talking with the staff, but that it isn't possible the way their day is structured.

They also griped that the food "smells like poop" and that there is "no love" put into the menu, choice of ingredients or the preparation. However, upon

follow up, the chef has since been replaced with the former Camp Gonzales' chef whose cooking was well-liked. Reportedly the food is now far better, according to the youth.

The different groups are unable to share the dining room at the same time, as fights break out.

When asked if they have filed any grievances, they all agreed that the grievance system "doesn't work and there is no point." There also did not seem to be any obvious ombudsman sign in the unit we visited.

They also believe that the "staff at CK come here because they care" and that they have helped the boys learn to "accept things they know they have to do but may not want to do".

While several of those we interviewed stated that there is far less fighting at CK than at Challenger, one young man stated that since his arrival, he has gotten into three fights "due to boredom."