

Los Angeles County Deputy Probation Officers' Union
AFSCME LOCAL 685



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The Honorable Hilda Solis
Chair, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
500 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Immediate Safety Concerns Regarding Co-Housing and Staffing at Campus Vernon Kilpatrick and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

As the new President of the Los Angeles County Deputy Probation Officers Union, AFSCME Local 685, I write to convey the deep and growing concern of our members regarding current operational practices at Campus Vernon Kilpatrick (CVK).

Local 685 members are working in conditions that have become increasingly unsafe for both youth and officers as a result of a poorly designed and hastily executed depopulation plan. Violent minors and young adults classified as high-risk Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF) youth are now being co-housed with non-SYTF minors (both Camp and pre-disposition intake minors), fundamentally changing the safety dynamics inside these facilities. These decisions were implemented without adequate classification safeguards, sufficient training, or appropriate equipment to safely break up fights and large-scale brawls. The result has been predictable: escalating violence, injured staff, injured wards, and officers placed in untenable situations where they are expected to restore order without the tools, preparation, or staffing levels necessary to do so safely.

At Campus Vernon Kilpatrick, high-risk female youth and young adult offenders were transferred from multiple facilities into a campus that previously functioned as a residential, home-like environment for lower-risk youth under the L.A. Model. The structured step-down screening process that once governed entry into that setting was effectively removed. That screening process existed to ensure behavioral stability, appropriate classification, and program readiness before placement in a less restrictive environment. Its elimination has had real consequences.

Today, pre-disposition minors and Camp minors are being co-housed with minors and young adults classified as high-risk Secure Youth Treatment Facility youth. These SYTF youth have been deemed appropriate for secure placement due to the seriousness of their offenses and behavioral histories. Mixing youth who are awaiting adjudication with those serving secure commitments fundamentally alters the safety dynamic within the institution. Our members report that this creates heightened tension, increases exposure to violence, and undermines rehabilitation efforts.

This is not isolated to Campus Kilpatrick. Similar co-housing practices are occurring at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, where long-standing classification distinctions based on legal status and risk profile are no longer being consistently maintained. When classification boundaries erode, predictable safety problems follow.

Compounding these risks is the reality of inadequate staffing levels. The Department continues to operate with significant vacancies, forcing officers to supervise increasingly complex populations without the appropriate ratios, backup, or relief. Our members are stretched thin. When high-risk populations are combined and supervision is diluted, the margin for error disappears.

The policy confusion surrounding the use of non-lethal OC spray further reflects this lack of preparation. Under the prior residential model at Campus Kilpatrick, OC spray was prohibited because the population did not present the same level of risk. When the campus shifted to functioning as a Secure Youth Treatment Facility with a higher-risk population, policy guidance and staff training did not keep pace with that operational change. Officers were left to navigate unclear directives in high-stress environments, with many assuming that SYTF policies carried over with the SYTF population.

In mid-January, fourteen youth, including high-risk SYTF youth, were involved in an uncontrolled seven-on-seven group fight. OC spray, a non-lethal and department-authorized tool within Secure Youth Treatment Facilities – which in effect is what CVK had become – was deployed to restore order and prevent serious injuries to both youth and staff. Incidents of this magnitude are a foreseeable outcome when violent populations are co-housed and staffing levels remain inadequate. What is deeply troubling is that frontline officers are left to manage the consequences of poorly planned policy decisions and then publicly criticized by members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for taking decisive action to stop a fight that could have resulted in severe harm to multiple young women.

As professional Probation peace officers, we support reform. We support rehabilitation. We support responsible population reduction. What we cannot support are operational decisions that compromise safety and expose both youth and staff to preventable violence. Nor can we accept repeated public attacks from members of the Board of Supervisors while we are working extended hours under extreme conditions, doing everything in our power to maintain order and protect the youth entrusted to our care.

We respectfully urge the Board to:

1. Immediately review and reevaluate the co-housing of pre-disposition minors with high-risk SYTF youth and young adults at all Probation facilities.
2. Reinstate structured screening and classification safeguards grounded in established correctional practice.
3. Conduct a comprehensive staffing analysis to ensure appropriate ratios for the current population mix.
4. Provide clear, consistent policy direction and training aligned with each facility's actual operational status.
5. Engage directly with frontline supervisors and officers before implementing further population or mission changes.

The members of AFSCME Local 685 are committed professionals. We report to work every day, and far too often remain on duty for 16 to 24 hours straight, performing a difficult and frequently thankless job. As the elected Supervisors of the largest county in the United States, it is your responsibility to ensure that we have a safe workplace, clear and consistent policy direction, and staffing levels that reflect the complexity and risk of the populations we are tasked with supervising.

Youth safety and staff safety are inseparable. When either is compromised, both are at risk. We urge the Board to act decisively and without delay to address these preventable conditions before further harm occurs. We stand ready to meet and work with you on practical, immediate solutions to these very real and urgent problems. I will be contacting your offices to schedule meetings to discuss these critical issues.

Respectfully,



Curtis Chambers
President

cc: Los Angeles County Deputy Probation Officers
Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
Senator Jesse Arreguín, Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee
Assembly Member Nick Schultz, Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee
Joe Nicchitta, Acting Chief Executive Officer, County of Los Angeles
Guillermo Viera Rosa, Chief Probation Officers, County of Los Angeles