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Hugs are banned in LA County juvenile halls. State legislation could change that.

LA County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to officially support The Hug Act authored by Assemblymember Isaac Bryan



Fourth District Supervisor Janice Hahn hugs Lawrence Bowie, who was formerly incarcerated at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall. The LA County Probation Department prohibits hugs by those in custody to anyone who visits. A bill by Assemblymember Isaac Bryan will change that. Hahn and the rest of the Board of Supervisors lent support to the bill Tuesday, March 3, 2026. (photo by Bryan Chan).

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A hug: noun. "A tight clasp with the arms; embrace."

Though this simple, yet brief human touch is common among family members, friends, spouses and lovers, hugs are prohibited for incarcerated youth at two Los Angeles County juvenile halls, namely Los Padrinos in Downey and Barry J. Nidorf in Sylmar. When anyone pays a visit, no contact is allowed, not even holding hands.

The Hug Act of 2026, introduced on Jan. 27 as Assembly Bill 1646 by Assemblymember Isaac Bryan, D-Los Angeles, would remove that prohibition and require all juvenile detention facilities in the county and across the state to make accommodations for hugs from visitors, as long as the youth in custody approves.

“I went out to Los Padrinos,” began Fourth District Supervisor Janice Hahn, whose motion to lend county support to Bryan’s bill was approved by the LA County Board of Supervisors on a 5-0 vote on Tuesday, March 3. “Many of these young men have not been able to embrace their mothers for months if not for years.”

The request to be able to hug their moms or dads, brothers or sisters, or other visitors while incarcerated came on a wish list of improvements from those inside the Downey facility and sent to Hahn on a poster back in 2024.

“Seeing that poster broke my heart,” said Hahn, whose district includes Downey. Hahn visits the facility monthly and holds dinners and a guest speaker series for the youth.

Later, Bryan came to Los Padrinos and with the help of the juveniles in custody wrote the bill that would give them the legal right to embrace a family member or friend during in-person visitations.

The bill was heard Tuesday morning in the California State Assembly Public Safety Committee and was passed out of committee.

“Children deserve to be held, loved on, and affirmed by their parents. Denying incarcerated children hugs doesn’t keep anybody any safer. It’s time for us to recenter rehabilitation and humanity in our juvenile justice system,” said Bryan in a prepared statement.

Bowie, who spoke before the Board, has been released from Los Padrinos and lives in a step-down facility in Long Beach. He got a hug from Hahn after the vote.

“I helped write it when I was in Los Padrinos,” he said. “When I was there, me and others would like to see our families and get a hug from our loved ones but we were not allowed.”

Hahn’s motion says studies show that appropriate physical touch between youth and loved ones often leads to positive mental health outcomes and less violent behavior.

Emily Zamora, policy campaign director for Youth Justice Coalition agreed. “Our young people deserve, need, above anything the right to have their families be able to give them a hug. The fact that I have to say that is ridiculous.”

As a member of the Probation Oversight Commission, Wendy Julien said The Hug Act aligns with the commission’s findings. “Parents are allies. They want to hug their children and are definitely able to help reduce recidivism,” she said.

However, county Probation Department head, Chief Guillermo Viera Rosa, told the board that allowing hugs is not such a black-and-white issue. The no-contact rules are in place to prevent contraband, such as illegal drugs, from passing from the visitor to the youth in custody.

Also, there may be some in custody who don’t want to see their parents or guardians nor hug them. And some may have good reason for avoiding them, as they may be victimized by them, he said. Hahn said if there is any question, the probation officers should ask those in custody and if they say no, then no hug should take place. The legislation allows for hugs, it doesn’t require them.

“What we’ve had is a black-and-white policy of no hugs. So the people at Los Padrinos went to Sacramento and found a champion who heard them. And he agreed,” said Hahn.

While Viera Rosa acknowledged the social and psychological benefits of hugs, especially for youth who still need their parents or guardians for emotional support, he also said allowing hugs during in-person visits will require more staffing, who will need to keep their eyes on the physical exchange.

During a one-time pilot of allowing hugs from visitors on Valentine’s Day, the Probation Department needed to bring in 20 additional officers to ensure proper oversight, said Deputy Robert Arcos. This is in addition to drug-detecting dogs and airport-like metal detectors.

If the bill becomes law, the county Probation Department will need more staffing during in-person visits. “It could have an impact of an additional \$1 million because of staffing,” he said.

Second District Supervisor Holly Mitchell, who co-sponsored the motion, said with contraband down and scanners and dogs in place during visitation, this is the right time to allow hugs during visitations.

“A hug can go a long way in supporting the well-being and development of young people in our juvenile justice system, as well as the families counting the days until their return home,” said Mitchell. “I’ve heard this firsthand during my visits to Los Padrinos, and there are longstanding examples of how a brief, warm embrace can be safely allowed for adults and other young people incarcerated throughout the state.”

The motion states that contact visits are standard practices in many California counties, as well as in correctional facilities in New York City, Washington D.C., and Houston.