

April 24, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0014

Re: CDF-CA Support for AB 999 Juveniles: Division of Juvenile Facilities

Dear Assemblywoman Skinner:

The Children's Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) is writing to express our support for AB 999, your legislation to improve our state's juvenile justice system by ending "time-adds" in the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

As you may know, CDF is a non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for 35 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. We champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. The Children's Defense Fund's Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. In furtherance of our work, CDF recently launched the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign, a state and national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youth, predominantly minorities, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, premature death.

For California youth who end up in the pipeline to prison, the struggle to get back on the right track can be extraordinarily difficult and filled with unnecessary barriers to rehabilitation and success. This is particularly true for youths who are sent to the state Division of Juvenile Justice. Youths in the state DJJ currently spend an average of nearly three years behind bars—that is the longest average period of incarceration in the nation. Over a third of that time is due to a disciplinary sanction known as "time adds" which can delay parole consideration by up to one year. As demonstrated by the DJJ's recidivism rate of 72 percent, extending a youth's time behind bars neither increases public safety nor improves outcomes for youth.

Not only are time adds a step backwards for the rehabilitation of incarcerated youths, they also place an enormous burden on taxpayers. DJJ spends nearly \$250,000 dollars per youth per year. On average, time adds increase youths' sentences by about 12.7 months. The additional incarceration time resulting from time adds for the entire population of youths currently at DJJ will cost over \$400 million—draining the state of critical resources that could be better spent on cost-effective prevention and early intervention programs.

AB 999 is a step in the right direction because it would replace the DJJ's punitive system with a more effective system that includes positive incentives for youths who participate in vocational, educational, rehabilitative

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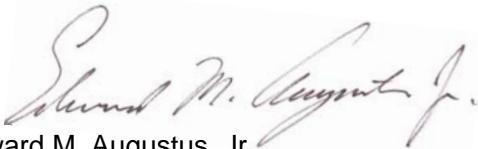
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or educational programming. Participation in these programs will give youths an opportunity to earn “program credits” that shorten the length of time they must serve before their next parole hearing. Adult prisons already allow individuals to earn time credits for desired behaviors, and AB 999 would provide this incentive to youths.

Juvenile correctional facility programs that focus on punishment, rather than treatment and rehabilitation, can create environments that further harden youths. This makes it more difficult for youths to productively reintegrate into their families and communities. AB 999 provides a more balanced approach, offering both incentives and consequences.

AB 999 is an important step forward to improving our state’s broken juvenile justice system and thus improving communities throughout California, and we urge your colleagues to support it. Every step we take to improve the lives of children and youths improves the lives of all Californians—today and in the future. Please contact CDF-CA Senior Policy Associate at lwade@cdfca.org or (619) 578-2429 with any questions. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all California children and youths have the opportunity to lead happy and healthy lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Edward M. Augustus, Jr.", written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Edward M. Augustus, Jr.
Executive Director
Children’s Defense Fund- California

cc: Assemblyman Jose Solorio, Chair, Assembly Committee on Public Safety
Members of Assembly Committee on Public Safety