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April 20, 2009

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

Dear Assemblymember Skinner,

The Greenlining Institute, a multi-ethnic public policy and advocacy organization, strongly supports AB 999, a bill to enhance incentives for youth in California's Division of Juvenile Justice ("DJJ"). We believe the most effective solution for juvenile offenders is to invest in educational opportunities that can help them out of the juvenile justice system.

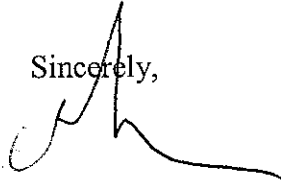
AB 999 replaces the system of punitive discipline in DJJ with a system providing youth with incentives to participate in their education and programming in a positive manner. By earning program credits, youth are given the opportunity to appear before the Juvenile Parole Board at an earlier date. AB 999 also eliminates the DJJ's use of "time adds," a practice that contributes to disproportionately long sentences for youth in California. AB 999 aims to bring youth prisons in line with adult prisons, where individuals may earn time credits for desired behaviors. The incentive-based system will encourage youth using positive reinforcements rather than punitive practices, which studies have discredited as ineffective.

Youth in DJJ currently spend an average of nearly three years behind bars. Over a third of that time is due to "time adds." Time adds are a disciplinary sanction that delays a youth's eligibility to appear before the Parole board. While an appearance before the Board does not guarantee release, AB 999 will provide youth with more opportunities to demonstrate their readiness for release.

DJJ's misuse of time adds is a primary reason that California has the longest average period of incarceration for youth in the nation, a disproportionate amount of whom are from minority communities. California holds a young person longer in the state prisons than do other states for comparable offenses. This results in long separations from work and family for the youth, and

enormous costs to taxpayers. Longer periods of lockup in our state's failed youth prisons do not result in increased public safety or better outcomes for youth.

Sincerely,



Orson Aguilar  
Executive Director



Tinbete Ermyas  
Higher Education Fellow



Chris Vaeth  
Legislative Director

cc: Assemblymember Skinner  
Books Not Bars