

April 13th, 2009

To: Sumayyah Waheed, Policy Director BNB

Re: AB 999 (Skinner)

The W. Haywood Burns Institute strongly supports AB 999 (Skinner), a bill to enhance incentives for youth in California's notorious Division of Juvenile Justice ("DJJ"). [Brief Description of your Organization].

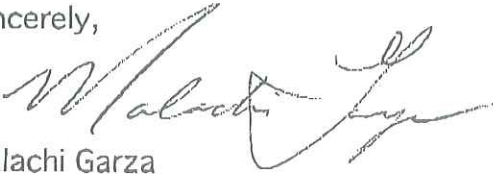
AB 999 replaces the ineffective system of punitive discipline in DJJ with a system providing youth with incentives to participate in their education and programming in a positive manner. By earning program credits, youth are given the opportunity to appear before the Juvenile Parole Board at an earlier 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. 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.

Currently, DJJ spends \$234,000 per youth, per year, and has an extraordinary recidivism rate of 72%. In this economic climate, time adds are a costly and harmful practice that just does not make sense. AB 999 by Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner is a better-balanced approach, offering both incentives and consequences. [Name of your Organization] strongly supports AB 999 and respectfully urges your support as well. Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malachi Garza". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Malachi Garza

W. Haywood Burns Institute

cc: Assemblymember Skinner
Books Not Bars