

PRESS RELEASE

DATE: July 12, 2022

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**Lawsuit for Public Transparency & Community Participation in
Sacramento County's Juvenile Justice Planning**
*Plaintiff Youth Forward seeks court order requiring
Sacramento County to comply with state public meeting laws*

Sacramento, CA –Youth Forward, a Sacramento-based non-profit, has filed a lawsuit to stop Sacramento County from excluding the public from its local juvenile justice planning meetings. Youth Forward's mission is to improve the health, education, and wellbeing of Sacramento's most vulnerable children and youth. Their lawsuit seeks a court order requiring Sacramento County and its local juvenile justice planning bodies to follow the open and public meeting laws under the Brown Act. They are represented by the law firms Baker McKenzie and the Youth Law Center.

“At Youth Forward, we believe that young people must play a central role in social change efforts,” says Jim Keedy, Executive Director of Youth Forward. “When youth and communities are left out of policymaking, they have no voice in policies that directly affect them. Supporting the leadership development of young people requires access to these crucial local policymaking spaces.”

Sacramento County, like all counties across the state, is currently engaged in the local juvenile justice planning process required by state law under the [Juvenile Justice Realignment Act](#), enacted in 2020. Under this law, California is closing its state juvenile facilities and realigning juvenile justice responsibilities to the jurisdiction of the counties. In Sacramento, two local bodies—the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council and the Realignment Subcommittee—have been conducting Sacramento's juvenile justice planning process in violation of state open meeting requirements.

“Sacramento is at a critical moment for juvenile justice reform,” says Nia MooreWeathers, Community Organizer at Youth Forward. “Millions of dollars have been wasted on a failed correctional approach, but with juvenile justice realignment, Sacramento has an opportunity to change course. We can reform the system to focus on youth healing and wellbeing, but this will only happen with meaningful community participation and input.”

The Juvenile Justice Realignment Act marks a transformative shift in California's juvenile justice system. Along with the closure of the state's juvenile facilities, the Act created a new state fund



for counties to implement a public health approach to juvenile justice that supports positive youth development, builds the capacity of a continuum of community-based interventions, and reduces crime by youth. ([S.B. 823, § 1\(c\)](#).) This new state funding stream, the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant, is substantial, totaling almost \$40 million in its first year and increasing to over \$200 million by 2024. ([Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 1990-1995](#).) By 2024, it is anticipated that Sacramento County will be receiving over \$9 million annually from the state.

To receive these state funds, counties must conduct a local planning process led by their Realignment Subcommittees. Unfortunately, as alleged in the lawsuit, Sacramento County’s realignment planning has been conducted in total violation of the Brown Act’s public meeting laws. The lack of public participation in Sacramento conflicts with the intent of realignment to expand the continuum of community-based responses to youth behavior.

“The input of community members—particularly juvenile justice-impacted youth and families—is vital to the success of the realignment process,” says Erin Palacios, staff attorney with the Youth Law Center. “Right now, Sacramento County is making important juvenile justice policy decisions without community input, oversight, or transparency. This case is about ensuring community access and participation in juvenile justice planning in Sacramento.”

Through its lawsuit, Plaintiff Youth Forward is asking the court to require Sacramento County’s juvenile justice planning bodies to comply with the Brown Act’s public meeting and participation laws going forward.

[*Youth Forward v. County of Sacramento County et al.*, Sacramento County Superior Court, Case # 34-2022-80003909, 7/1/2022. Complaint available [here](#).]

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About Us

The **Youth Law Center** advocates to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation so every child and youth can thrive. www.ylc.org

Youth Forward advocates for policy and systems changes that increase investments in children and youth and that reduce the criminalization of young people. <https://www.youth-forward.org/>