



PRESS RELEASE

DATE: December 15, 2022

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Youth Forward Settles Lawsuit Against County of Sacramento, Increasing Community Participation in Local Juvenile Justice Planning

Sacramento, CA – A settlement has been reached between Youth Forward and the County of Sacramento that will strengthen community participation in local juvenile justice planning. The settlement resolves the [lawsuit](#) filed in July 2022 by the law firm Baker McKenzie and the Youth Law Center on behalf of Youth Forward, a Sacramento-based non-profit focused on improving the health, education, and wellbeing of Sacramento's most vulnerable children and youth. The lawsuit alleged that two local bodies responsible for juvenile justice planning in Sacramento County—the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council and the Realignment Subcommittee—were conducting their work in violation of the Brown Act, California's open meeting laws.

Under the [settlement agreement](#), both of Sacramento County's juvenile justice planning bodies will comply with the Brown Act's public meeting laws going forward. Additionally, Sacramento County has agreed to further expand the community's ability to participate in local juvenile justice planning. For example, Sacramento will maintain at least four community member seats on its Realignment Subcommittee, will provide a video or teleconference option to allow community members to participate in meetings remotely, and will post all meeting materials and recordings on its public website.

"Our mission at Youth Forward is to empower young people to make social change, but unfortunately, our communities were being left out of crucial juvenile justice policy decisions," says Jim Keddy, Executive Director of Youth Forward. "This settlement represents an important step for Sacramento County, and we look forward to continuing to build towards a better future for Sacramento's young people."

Sacramento County, like all counties across the state, is currently engaging in a local juvenile justice planning process required by the "Juvenile Justice Realignment Act," enacted by the Legislature in 2020 through [Senate Bill 823](#). Under this law, California is closing its state juvenile facilities and realigning juvenile justice responsibilities to the jurisdiction of the counties.

The Juvenile Justice Realignment Act marked a transformative shift in California's juvenile justice system. Along with the closure of the state's juvenile facilities, the Act established a state fund for the 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, requires counties to engage in a local planning process to guide how the funds will be invested within the county. ([Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 1990-1995](#).)



The state funding to be distributed to the counties in the Realignment process is substantial—almost \$40 million was allocated during the first round in 2021, and the funding will increase to over \$200 million by 2024. In the first two years of funding, Sacramento County has already received over \$10 million in state funds. The county planning process is critically important to developing a local plan for these funds that implements the public health approach to juvenile justice that is called for under state law.

“We are pleased with the response from Sacramento County and the swift resolution of this case,” says Erin Palacios, Youth Law Center staff attorney. “Not only has Sacramento committed to complying with public meeting laws, it also has taken steps to encourage public participation and ensure that its local plans will be subject to annual review. These policies will serve Sacramento County well as it works to design a county system that is responsive to children and their families.”

As California continues the task of implementing juvenile justice Realignment, the counties’ local planning bodies will remain responsible for identifying needs within the county and ensuring that resources are invested appropriately to meet those needs. Realignment calls for an expansion of community-based juvenile justice programming, and community members are in the best position to determine how to achieve this goal. It is therefore critical for Sacramento County’s juvenile justice planning bodies to conduct their work with transparency and meaningful opportunities for youth and families to participate.

Statewide, Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils and Realignment Subcommittees in many counties are complying with the Brown Act. Others, however, continue to meet and make decisions in violation of these basic requirements. Holding closed-door meetings excludes the public from participating in local policymaking. It also prevents impacted community members from addressing decision makers, posing questions, and offering input. The purpose of the Brown Act is to protect the public’s most basic right to address their representatives and to know how and why decisions are made. Juvenile justice planning bodies that are not in compliance with the Brown Act should correct their processes so that communities can participate in decisions about their children.

“As a member of the Sacramento Kids First Coalition, Youth Forward is committed to ensuring that our families and communities can have their voices heard,” says Nia MooreWeathers, Youth Forward Organizer. “With this settlement, we are more energized than ever to advocate for a juvenile justice system that centers the healing and wellbeing of our young people.”

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

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/>