

AB 505

Fulfilling California's Promise to Vulnerable Youth



SUMMARY

California youth deserve every opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive. AB 505 ensures the new state youth justice office has the tools it needs to partner with counties in continuing the youth justice system transformation that began in 2020, and to keep them safe.

BACKGROUND

California began transforming its juvenile justice system from a corrections model to an evidence-driven, health-based approach when the Legislature passed SB 823 in 2020. It opened the state's first office of youth justice, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR), to facilitate this transformation, and created an Ombudsperson to investigate violations of youth rights in the juvenile justice system. The Legislature also closed the state's youth prisons, so that, starting this year, all incarcerated youth will be held in county facilities. As a part of this change, the state provides more than \$200 million annually to counties for the care of youth.

Under current law, to receive those funds, counties must submit a plan to the OYCR that includes certain required elements and describes how they will meet the needs of youth. However, the law does not clearly state that the plans must be approved by the OYCR before the funding is awarded.

The OYCR Ombudsperson is the only state youth-focused investigator for complaints about possible harm to incarcerated youth. Current law requires the Ombudsperson to give 48 hours' prior notice before talking with a youth, accessing records, or visiting a facility. This delay creates a risk of further harm, especially when dealing with

vulnerable young people placed in conditions that have been detrimental to their wellbeing. In contrast, the Foster Youth Ombudsperson has immediate access to youth, their records, and facilities.

The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) is a corrections-oriented body that largely focuses on the adult criminal justice system. It currently also has authority over locked juvenile facilities and staffing standards. For efficiency and effectiveness, the BSCC's youth responsibilities should move to the OYCR, which the Legislature has designated as the state's leader in youth justice policy.

THIS BILL

AB 505 clarifies existing law and strengthens accountability, ensures county plans are consistent with health-based approaches, enables the Ombudsperson to respond quickly to youth who may be facing abuse, and consolidates regulatory authority and technical assistance under the state's youth justice expert, the OYCR. As a part of California's effort to transform youth justice, AB 505:

- Requires review and approval of county plans, ensuring that state funds are used as intended by the Legislature, and requires plans be developed with regular local community participation.
- Ensures all youth are treated equally and get help as quickly as possible from the Ombudsperson.
- Places all BSCC youth-related duties under the OYCR to ensure consistency with the Legislature's transformative vision.

SUPPORT

Alliance for Children's Rights (Co-Sponsor)
Anti-Recidivism Coalition (Co-Sponsor)
California Youth Connection (Co-Sponsor)
Haywood Burns Institute (Co-Sponsor)
Human Rights Watch (Co-Sponsor)
National Center for Youth Law (Co-Sponsor)
Pacific Juvenile Defender Center (Co-Sponsor)
Young Women's Freedom Center (Co-Sponsor)

STAFF CONTACT

Tania Natalie Dikho
(916) 319-2019
Tania.Dikho@asm.ca.gov