

youth justice coalition

WE CAN GET THIS!!

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 7, 2009



We won!!! For the past year, the YJC has worked with youth and parents to challenge the billing of families for every day that young people spend in juvenile halls or camps. **On Friday, February 13th, Robert Taylor, the Chief of Probation, declared a moratorium (suspension) on all billing of families!**

Do not pay any outstanding bills. Do not pay any new bills should you receive them. Pass this report on to everyone you know. To reply to Probation, send a letter stating, "I understand that the Probation Department has a moratorium on all billing for juvenile halls and camps. I assume that I will not have to pay any more fees"

To get support, send copies of past and present bills along with any letters you send Probation to the Youth Justice Coalition at the PO Box on the bottom of this action update. Also, this Saturday, March 7th, attend the next meeting of families organizing for youth justice, including an end to all billing and changes in conditions in lock-ups and in our communities. The meeting will take place from 6-8pm at *Chuco's Justice Center, at 1137 East Redondo Blvd. just one light west of Crenshaw and Florence on the border between South Central L.A. and Inglewood.*

Getting Paid

The Bills Collected by the Los Angeles County Department of Probation Put Youth at Risk and Impoverish Families

When Ruth Mayfield's son, Marcel was 14 he got arrested for joy riding and ended up in juvenile hall. Since then, he's been to a

camp program and three different court-ordered placements. The entire time he's been in custody, the Probation Department's been running a tab.

For more than a year, dozens of families, parents and the Youth Justice Coalition have organized an effort to challenge the Department's billing of families. On February 13th, Probation Chief Taylor announced a temporary moratorium on all billing. The YJC, led by the youth and parents most affected, is calling for an end to billing, as well as a full investigation on the effects of the practice on youth, families and communities that can be shared with other counties throughout California.

Until the February 13th moratorium, the L.A. County Department of Probation charged families – over 95 percent of whom are poor and working class – as much as \$23.63 dollars for each day – or nearly \$750 each month – that their child was in juvenile hall, and \$11.94 for each day they were in camp. The majority of the fees were charged to families while the child was in juvenile hall, so parents are also being held financially accountable for the slow movement of cases through court. In some cases, families have also received bills prior to the case's disposition, meaning that youth who are potentially innocent of all charges were still billed.



This personalized license plate appears on a Probation staff's SUV outside Camp Scott, a girl's prison in Saugus.

What's at stake if the moratorium on billing doesn't become permanent?

The Mayfield family, which struggles to put food on the table and come up with rent money each month, now has an additional bill over \$7,000 they owe to Probation.

Of course, Probation also receives its operating costs from federal, state and local tax dollars – approximately \$50,000 a year for youth in detention and camp. So, in Marcel's case, you'd think that after three years, a cost to taxpayers of more than \$150,000, and an added cost to his family of more than \$7,000, Marcel would be making progress – graduating high school, starting college or a career.

Instead, says his mom, "He's both angrier and more depressed than ever. The staff at the placements he's been in, as well as our family, complains that he's rude and obnoxious. But, to me that's just a front. I've seen him cry as often as I've seen him fight. He wants to come home, but has no idea how to make that happen. What I see in him more than anything is fear – that he sees nothing positive in his future. He told my niece, 'I'm about to be 18, and I don't know how to be a man. What am I going to do?'"

The pain and frustration that Mayfield feels for Marcel, is evident in her eyes. As she speaks, they reflect a deep sadness with occasional flashes of anger. Her anger is in part aimed at the system of police and courts and juvenile halls and camps and placements – an endless line of uniforms, judges and agencies that hold families accountable for everything, and themselves, accountable for nothing. In Marcel’s case, he has earned little school credits, and has never received the mental health and drug treatment he needs throughout his time in the system.

While in juvenile hall, the mental health unit ran out of Risperol, the medication that Marcel takes for ADHD. Without notifying Mayfield to get the necessary parental permission, mental health changed Marcel to a substitute medication. Says Mayfield, “For three weeks, Marcel was bouncing off the walls – he got three write-ups [for bad behavior], and no one called me!!! I saw Marcel at visiting and saw how sleepy he was – he looked dead in the eyes. The medication also irritated his hands – they were completely red and raw. Still, Marcel’s the one who told me about the new medication.”

At the time, Mayfield called the Youth Justice Coalition, and we contacted the Ombudsmen for County Probation and the Family Advocate at the Department of Mental Health. The medication was changed, but not before the damage had been done.

Marcel’s behavior was the result of being on the wrong medication. But when he went to court, the judge only heard that he had been in trouble, not why. As a result, Marcel got a harsher sentence and was sent to Probation Camp. Despite the pain and suffering caused to Marcel and his family, or the impact this had on his receiving a Camp sentence, Probation never offered to eliminate or reduce Mayfield’s bills.



Among the parent leaders fighting to stop the billing of families are, (from left), Starletta DuPois, Jose Isaac Gonzalez, Olga Medina and Eric Hernandez.

The YJC has interviewed 66 families that are receiving bills, and has also interviewed seven youth about how the bills have impacted their relationships with their family. Probation claims that families can appeal the costs based on their income, but until the moratorium, the only relief we witnessed came for a few families who appealed directly to County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. Many families are put on monthly payment plans, and will be paying the fees for more than a decade. Others lose income and property. Families receive threatening calls from at least one collection agency and lawyers retained by the County.

The story of Ruth Mayfield and her son, Marcel is all too common. Both families and the County’s leading child advocates have become increasingly upset by Probation’s aggressive billing practices.

1. According to the Department of Probation, all families are notified of the billing policy. However, only nine out of 66 families interviewed by the YJC were told that they could challenge the bill or make a payment arrangement. None of the youth interviewed ever received a letter or an orientation to the billing – either in court, in juvenile hall or in camp, despite the fact that families often expect or need them to pay or help pay the fees. Chief Taylor claimed that the best place to notify families is at juvenile hall intake and at visiting. But

parents *aren't at intake* – the police take youth to the halls. And many families can't make it to visiting given the distance, work, child-care or cost of gas. The YJC pointed out to Chief Taylor and the Board Of Supervisors that the only place where parents are absolutely required to participate, and where they participate regularly, is in court.

2. The Youth Justice Coalition mobilized youth and parent leaders to meet with Probation Chief Taylor on these issues on August 28th, at which time we presented him with the preliminary version of this report covering the results of the first 49 interviews with families. We also invited Human Rights Watch, the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, the County's Service Planning Area 2, and the County's Human Relations Commission to that meeting, in order to determine whether the Probation Department was violating state standards and county policies. After reviewing Probation's billing process, Human Rights Watch sent a follow-up letter to Chief Taylor in December. Elizabeth Calvin, recognized nationally for her work with Human Rights Watch's Child Rights Division, explained that the letter sent to families notifying them of the billing is difficult to understand and is not clear on their right to appeal the fees. At Wednesday's hearing with the Board of Supervisors, Calvin said, "the letter that goes out to families is difficult to understand even for myself who is familiar with juvenile justice practices and legal language."

Cherylynn Hoff from the County Human Relations Commission stated that the parent and youth testimony presented at the meeting "raised serious concerns" regarding Probation's ability to meet its own objectives. "If the stated goals of Probation are to rebuild lives and provide for healthier and safer communities, how do the incredibly harsh billing practices, that contribute to so much family stress and conflict, match with those goals?"

Deborah Davies is a member of the SPA 2 and Mental Health Director with Friends of the Family, one of the San Fernando Valley's leading social service agencies. She has supervised a parenting class for young men at Sylmar Juvenile Hal, and has provided ongoing support and resource referrals to the families who worked on this report and the accompanying campaign to challenge the billing. "How can we as a County say that we care for youth when we create the conditions that rob them of any hope, bill poor families for thousands of dollars in inferior services, and then damage the same family relationships that youth most rely on when they come home?"

3. In the meeting on August 28th, Chief Taylor stated that he "had no choice," whether or not to bill families, because it was "mandated by state law." However, the State's Welfare and Institutions Code "permits counties to charge a reasonable fee for food, clothes, personal items and a limited amount for medical after other possible funding sources are exhausted." Los Angeles County Children's Commissioner Carol Biondi has questioned the County's billing practices for years. She has regular contact with young people and Probation staff through a well-respected college and career preparation and community re-entry project at Camp Gonzalez. While former Probation Chiefs Richard Shumsky and Paul Higa both billed families, the Department's direction under Chief Taylor has been much more widespread. According to Biondi, "the Los Angeles County Probation Department has chosen to charge parents for their children's stays in their halls and camps. San Francisco has chosen not to. California, along with the majority of States and Counties all over this Country, are dedicated to best practices and believe that youth rehabilitation is what their job is all about. True, Code 903 allows Counties to charge parents "reasonable costs" for child support. But the Legislature was clear in its intent that it should only be imposed upon persons "with the ability to pay" and to protect persons that the county might impose "liability through excessive costs". The legal protections are clearly stated. Parents are to be told at the "close of the disposition hearing" that they may be liable and should appear before a financial evaluator -- after that if parents disagree, the fee can be waived or they are entitled to a hearing with a lawyer paid by the County. The burden is on the County to prove that parents can pay -- not on the parents to prove that they can not. Of the multiple cases I am familiar with, these rights have been ignored and the procedural protections have not been followed."

Biondi is also critical of the effect that aggressive billing could mean for the reform efforts at Probation. "Los Angeles has spent millions of dollars to (someday) introduce evidence-based programs to these facilities. The hired consultants have emphasized how critically important it is for Probation to help youth 'reduce conflict, and build positive relationships and communications' with their families. This is essential if these young people are to be successful."

4. In the fall, the YJC shared our preliminary report with the L.A. Times, and invited them to meet with families. The Times highlighted many of the families involved in the organizing campaign. In their investigation, they discovered that "despite increasingly aggressive billing policies, only \$2.6 million of the \$23.6 million billed last year was recovered. To recover even that small portion, the county spent \$812,000 on a five-person probation fee collections office and \$56,000 on an Austin, Texas-based collections agency."

Families are often struggling simultaneously to pay juvenile hall or camp bills, truancy and curfew tickets, restitution and court costs, fees for everything from anger management to counseling and community service, all while missing work (and losing wages) to attend numerous court or Probation appearances.

The financial consequences can be devastating:

1. The Barnes family had three children in the system – each for short camp stays. Their bill quickly grew to a debt of more than \$15,000. The County put a lean on their house that also impacted their credit report. In addition their employer was contacted to take the money from wages.
2. Maria Argumedo's bill for \$2,809 for three months at Camp Holton, is a special hardship on her five other children who go "without extra food, school shoes or family outings" such as the movies, when Probation gets a payment.
3. Ena Bolanos owes thousands of dollars and fears that she will lose her house soon.
4. Dana Martin has seven children at home and owed the County \$4,569 by the late spring of 2008. Probation threatened to take her income tax refund.
5. Rosa Salcedo is a grandmother who took over the care of her three grandchildren when her son was struggling with drug addiction. The County has never given her kinship care funds or other financial support for the children. On Sundays, she rushes from Sylmar after juvenile hall visiting to her part-time, night job at Sears. As of February of 2008, her bill was \$3,728.42. She received no reduction in her bill from the Department of Probation, but instead received a payment plan and was ordered to pay \$25 a month. At that rate, she will be paying the Department for the next 12 1/2 years.
6. Another mom, who wants to remain anonymous because she fears complaining will hurt her son's case, is concerned that parents are also paying for the failure of the system to rehabilitate youth or help them to successfully re-enter the community. Her 17-year-old son was first arrested at the age of 13 when he and his two 12-year-old friends got into a fight with an 18-year-old who assaulted them. His first camp sentence was for 18 months. But he spent most of the next four years in camp. Usually he is "refilled" on, where time is added because of incidents that occur in camp. He was supposed to come home in April, but he was just refilled on again and returned to juvenile hall for court. In tears, his mom explained, "Some refiling has been for real problems, but some has been for minor things. It's freezing in the camps, but they refile on people if they're found with an extra sweatshirt or blanket. The youth are always hungry, but some refiling for people who sneak extra food from the cafeteria. All of that extra food and clothes is considered contraband. My son was so depressed, frustrated and angry when they refilled on him this time, that he said he was going to kill himself. So they put him on suicide watch, on lockdown in a cell. When I went to today for visiting, I walked in on the staff restraining him – he was naked and being strapped into a suit that ties his hands and arms down (a straight jacket)." She has two other children at home. She has worked for the past 8 years at a dry cleaners where she earns \$685 a month. Her husband works as an assistant to a gardener earning \$650 a month. She also manages an apartment building in exchange for free rent. She has paid Probation \$50 a month for 14 months and still has \$11,000 left to pay. The collection agency threatened to take her paycheck. In November, she went to Probation with additional proof of her family's income and they only reduced the payments to \$25 a month.
7. The Pop family lives in South Central Los Angeles and have three children and two grandchildren living at home. Edwin Pop is 17, and his family has a bill for his time in Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall and a placement – Optimist Home for a total bill over \$6,000. The first warning that the family received was through a bill sent from court. Edwin's mother Irma Grudiel and his 21-year-old sister Wendy Pop have already paid \$3,000. Grudiel was laid off from her job at a curtain-making factory 8 months ago, so she pawned all her jewelry in order to raise the majority of the first payment. In order to make ends meet, Wendy Pop is now the head of household and works to pay half of the family's \$2,000 a month rent, utilities and approximately \$200 in food. They rent half of their house to another family in order to make up the difference.
8. Jose Gonzalez' twin sons were detained in juvenile hall, and one also at camp. After 20 years working at Albertson's Supermarket, Gonzalez earns \$40,000 a year on which he supports his two sons, daughter and step-daughter. He appealed his bill which was over \$5,000, and while he received no reduction, he did receive a payment plan of \$50 a month. But, when Probation learned that his ex-wife was receiving free rent in exchange for managing the apartment building where she lives, Probation reversed it's decision and notified Gonzalez that he would have to pay \$500 a month, along with an additional \$100 for his ex-wife's portion.

Of course, families have already paid for Probation services – as have everyone in California – through their taxes. As several families stated, "aren't we being billed twice?"

Everyone is billed.

In meetings with the Youth Justice Coalition and in the Public Safety hearing on Wednesday, February 11th, Probation Chief Taylor admitted that “everyone is billed,” but that the Department stops the billing if families demonstrate they are on SSI or public assistance. *However:*

1. The mother of two young boys was in an abusive relationship and had gone to both the hospital and the police several times. She was incarcerated in state prison, when she accidentally hit someone with her car while fleeing from her attacker. The grandparents have cared for their two grandsons ever since. They are now being billed by Probation for the youngest son’s detention, despite the fact that they earn a combined total of \$772 a month in SSI and also care for their severely disabled daughter who is confined to a wheelchair.
2. One mom was tracked down and billed while living with her children in a homeless shelter.
3. Moises Panduro isn’t working, and receives about \$200 a month in income. His wife recently died, and he has been sick. The Probation Department has continued to bill him.
4. Michael Bowler was volunteering with the Catholic Church’s ministry inside juvenile hall. He met 16-year-old Edward Hanson who was detained at the time, and decided to take in Edward and his brother, Louis through foster care. In October he received a \$10,000 bill from Probation, despite the fact that Edward was still technically a ward of the County, and the majority of the bill was for a period when Mr. Bowler hadn’t even known him. Despite several attempts to contact the Department of Probation, the billing continued, and in November, the County issued a lien on the Bowlers’ home. Finally, when Bowler complained to County Supervisor Yaroslavsky, the Supervisor’s office ordered Probation to stop the billing.
5. At the February 11th hearing, Chief Taylor and Robert Smythe also said that they intended to explore how child support payments and public assistance can also be redirected to the Department of Probation away from families who have youth in custody.

Parents who have adopted children or are foster parents also receive bills.

1. Joe Boyd from the Antelope Valley man adopted a four-year-old boy. When his son was arrested at the age of 11, he took early retirement in order to stay at home and “give his son more guidance, especially through school, because he was getting kicked out almost every day.” But, when the first bill arrived from the Probation Department for over \$4,000, he had to return to work in order to pay the fees. He never received a letter warning him of the fees. The first notice he received was in the form of a bill. He met twice with Probation, and was told they could only give him a payment plan of \$60 as month. His bill is now \$5,400. So, while one County department – the Division of Children and Family Services – believes that adoptive, kinship care and foster care families deserve appreciation and support, the Department of Probation bills all family equally.
2. Starletta DuPois from South Central Los Angeles negotiated a payment plan with Probation, and has been paying \$50 a month for her adopted son’s detention at juvenile hall and camp, despite the fact that he was under the care of the Division of Children and Family Services at the time of his detention.
3. At the February 11th hearing, Chief Taylor and Bureau Chief Smythe originally said that the Department bills everyone including foster care and adoptive families. Then, when pressed by the Supervisors’ staffs on the ethics of billing foster families, Chief Taylor reversed his earlier statement to say he was “sure the Department was not charging foster families.”

The process of what gets billed depending on a youth’s location in juvenile or adult court, juvenile hall or camp is also unclear.

The families of youth who are transferred into the adult court system are not billed, because their movement through the court system often takes years. However, Olga Medina has been billed for the time that her son was in juvenile court on the same case before her son was transferred into adult court.

The YJC has also met several families, including Medina’s, who were billed before their son or daughter made it through the court process. *This means that families are billed even if their child is acquitted of all charges. And we have not found a family that ever received a refund on a bill.*

The fees charged for time in juvenile hall and camp are different. But in the bills that families shared with YJC, no such itemization existed. It was impossible to determine whether or not families were charged correctly.

The Exaggerated Claim that Billing Prevents Parents from Abandoning Youth to the System

In a memo interpreting the law that enables the County to bill families for their time in juvenile hall, camps, on house arrest and placements, Juvenile Justice Advocate David Steinhart wrote of Section 903 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, “the basic policy of holding parents liable for child support costs incurred by justice system agencies does have

value – not just to shore up local Probation budgets, but also as a deterrent for parents who seek to use juvenile halls and other system facilities as ‘free babysitting’ opportunities.” But, this comment seems harsh and inaccurate. While the YJC recognizes that some parental abuse and neglect exists, we did not find a family who had intentionally abandoned their youth to the system, except in the case of one guardian – the County itself. With youth in the DCFS (dependency) system, they were often left to the full custody of the delinquency system.

In addition, only 11 families of those interviewed by the YJC said they received warnings about what would happen if they failed to make payments, although the County took such drastic measures as confiscating tax refunds, putting liens on homes and contacting employers to withdraw payments directly from wages. This is particularly confusing given that one of the reasons that Probation Chief Taylor gave us for billing families was also to discourage parents from “dumping their children on the system.” Given Chief Taylor’s and the state code’s intentions to discourage parental reliance on the system, you would expect the County to notify parents at first contact about the fees they would have to pay to prevent them from relying on the system.

But in February 11th’s hearing before the Board of Supervisors’ Public Safety Cluster, both Chief Taylor and Robert Smythe, who is in charge of the billing unit at Probation, admitted that families first find out about the bills in a letter. Further, Chief Taylor stated that parents are “best notified” at juvenile hall intake and on visiting days. But parents aren’t at intake – police drop off youth at the halls once their arrest is processed. And many parents never make it to visiting, due to lack of funds or transportation, child-care or work. In addition, the many parent and youth leaders who worked on this report have never seen Probation staff at visiting informing parents of the billing process.

To track the improper use of juvenile halls and camps, the Youth Justice Coalition has also pushed the Probation Department to collect and release data on the zip code, race, gender, charges and referral source for all youth processed through the system. This is the only way that Probation and other law enforcement can be monitored for racial and gender bias in arrest, detention or sentencing; for the misuse of detention by Probation; for the misuse of arrest by law enforcement agencies throughout the county; or for the use of the system by parents.

Without that data, the YJC has collected anecdotal evidence and has regularly asserted that only a tiny fraction of the more than 20,000 youth processed each year through L.A. County’s three juvenile halls are there because parents requested it. Even then, the parents we have met in this situation were desperate for help and called the police or Probation for support, not because they wanted to “dump” their children off on the system.



Eva Aguilar leads a meeting of family members whose youth are detained at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall. The facility is one of L.A.’s three juvenile halls. Parents, brothers and sisters of youth detained at Barry J. meet after visiting twice a month, receive leadership training, legal education, court preparation and peer support, and have been organizing to change conditions inside the halls, challenge extreme sentencing of youth in adult court, and question the fairness of the Probation Department’s billing of families.

Parents who are stressed by youth who are addicted to drugs, missing curfew, refusing to go to school, cursing out family members are in need of immediate help and relief. Who are they encouraged to call in these situations – by school officials, clergy, public officials? The police. Especially in L.A. County, which has invested little to no funds for community-based youth centers, parents have virtually no other resource to turn to. And, when they do turn to the police for help, they’re never been told, “Okay, we’ll take your child in to juvenile hall, but beware. It’s going to cost you \$25 a day, plus court fees, restitution fees, probation fees...”

Two parents did report seeking help from the police, Probation and court systems thinking that their child would get real support and treatment over a short period of time. Instead they are horrified to “lose their child to the system, and find themselves begging in court to regain custody. Youth who go in with minor problems emerge violent, angry, distant, often gang involved. And they are even more alienated from their families who they blame for “turning them in.” Eva Aguilar asked for help nine years ago, and never got her son back. She called the police when her young son was having trouble with drugs and disobeying curfew. She thought he would be detained for a few days and then referred to programs where he could get some help. Instead, he cycled in and out of the halls and camps for most of his teenage years, where he became increasingly “angry and depressed,” more and more involved in gangs, and eventually “graduated” to the adult system. He is now serving a long state prison term. Aguilar still has a bill for more than \$7,000.

Eric Hernandez agrees. He also called the police for help when his daughter Cristina was a young teen, and now 18, she's been "trapped" in the system ever since. He's wondering why he and other parents are being billed for conditions that damage so many lives.

Those that enter the juvenile halls addicted to drugs or alcohol get virtually no drug education or treatment. Those in need of mental health can't get adequate diagnosis or care. Education, job training, violence and gang prevention, in almost every area of youth development, the juvenile halls and most camps are rated by state and federal justice departments as failing to meet even the most basic youth development outcomes.

Billing Families for Inferior and Inadequate Supplies and Services

As mentioned above, California's Welfare and Institutions Code states that parents can only be billed for medical expenses (that can not be covered by other means such as private health insurance and Medical), food, clothes and the costs of "personals," (tooth paste, deodorant and shampoo). But, in numerous meetings with Probation, the YJC's youth and parent leaders have complained about the substandard conditions in these areas.



Luis Salazar and his mother wait anxiously in the hallway before being called into court at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

"I don't see how they can bill us or our families for food, clothes or personals," said Luis Salazar from Lynwood who was detained at Sylmar and Los Padrinos Juvenile Halls and at Camp Kilpatrick. "You get sick on the food, you freeze without enough blankets, you wear clothes that are stained with blood, urine and s#t, and your skin breaks out from the personals. The P.O.s, (Probation officers), put us down, curse us out, and OC spray us in the face if we talk back. We have to beg to pee. Plenty of people have peed themselves. And, the fights, gang banging and race riots are out of control... If our parents treated us like this at home, the cops would be arresting them, and we'd be in foster care."

On February 21st, families met to discuss how to organize for further changes. Jose Gonzales stated, "I would be willing to pay Probation if they were taking good care of my son. But, these kids are starving; they're lying in their cells crying themselves to sleep; they're not making any progress in school; they're

constantly in fights. My son came home angry, and he really needs a lot of counseling because of his experience in there. What am I paying for?"

Hygiene products distributed by Probation, known as "personals," are typically the cheapest and poorest quality available.

Numerous parents and youth have complained about the rashes, blisters and itching caused by the cheap deodorant, soap and shampoo purchased for the facilities. At Camp Scott, one young woman dropped to her knees sobbing because water blisters broke out under her arms after using the deodorant. She cried for nearly an hour, and other girls on the dorm pushed for the staff to respond before the nurse was finally called.

Clara Gomez has a bill for \$7,000. Her son got a severe rash from the soap at Sylmar, and was ignored for days when he sought medical attention.

The health conditions in the County's juvenile facilities are so dangerous that it seems impossible for the County to argue that billing for health costs is legitimate.

1. During the summer, Camp Gonzalez' cafeteria was closed by the County Health Department for a month due to its failure to meet County health codes – including controlling for roach and rodent infestation.
2. A month later, Camp Gonzalez' water supply was declared undrinkable for weeks due to the presence of e-coli in the water. The youth, however, continued to shower in the water. And, clothes and bedding were washed in the water. (Staff at the facility have repeatedly requested a new water tower.)
3. In testimony to the County Board of Supervisors, the County Health Department said that if they were scored with the ABC rating given restaurants, the cafeterias in Probation facilities would score an "F."

4. By Probation's own admission, violence in the facilities is widespread, including what they describe as numerous "riots." Youth are regularly, and seriously injured by both other youth and staff. Recently at Camp Scudder – one of the County's two girls' camps – two youth and eight staff received medical attention after a "riot." One developmentally disabled youth at Sylmar Juvenile Hall had his jaw shattered by a large group of youth, and medical staff feels he will suffer lifelong pain.
5. During the past year, toothpaste purchased by Probation was recalled, and CBS News reported that "L.A. Probation bought contaminated peanut products," for which the Food and Drug Administration issued a national alert and investigation.
6. A recent inspection by the federal Department of Justice (DOJ) found that L.A. County's Probation Camps were out of compliance in nearly every area. In highlighting the violence in the facilities, the report cited cases of physical abuse by youth on youth and staff on youth, understaffed facilities and improperly trained staff, and sexual abuse of youth by staff that was not correctly reported. The report demanded the end of "slamming or assuming the bob sled position for punitive or abusive purposes," and required that the Department develop and implement comprehensive policies regarding the use of force and OC spray. The County's halls were already operating under a DOJ consent decree.

Billing for Food: In the halls, Youth – especially young men – don't get enough to eat.

The parents who worked on this report are fighting for the most basic need of their children – adequate food. Young men at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall have complained for months about the portion size. Numerous parents complain that their sons have lost upwards of 30, 40 and even 50 pounds since being detained. Diane Perez' son had lost more than 30 pounds when he passed out and was taken to the hospital. Perez wasn't even notified of his hospitalization when it happened.

Ted Snyder's son has lost more than twenty pounds when we met with Chief Taylor in August, and Superintendent Garcia who directs Sylmar Juvenile Hall soon after. Those meetings resulted in his son receiving double portions. But, said Snyder, "I didn't want more food for my son. I want enough food for everyone! What happens to all the families who aren't part of the organizing, and who never get to talk to the Chief or the Superintendent?"



Among the youth who worked on this report and the organizing campaign to challenge the billing were YJC leaders at Camp Scott. The damage to hair by harsh shampoo and the lack of conditioners and oil is evidenced by breakage, hair loss and extreme dryness – especially for African American youth. The girls also appealed to both Chief Taylor and Probation's Camp Redesign Committee for disposable underwear or use of their own underclothes, due to the issuing of ripped underwear stained by urine, menstrual blood and feces.

Olga Medina's son Alfredo, 16, weighed 140 pounds when he entered Sylmar Juvenile Hall. Several months later while at court, he weighed 100 pounds with his clothes, shoes and shackles. After the YJC's August 28th meeting with Chief Taylor, he also received double portions for three months, and has gained some weight back. But, his double portions were just ended. Meanwhile, collectors have called Medina and threatened to take her car.

In the summer, youth and parents collected more than 400 signatures from the visitors at Barry J. Nidorf (Sylmar) Juvenile Hall, calling on Probation to increase the amount of food given youth in the halls. When the petitions and personal stories were shared with Chief Taylor on August 28th, he claimed that he had no control over food portions but that a maximum allowance of 2,000 calories was determined by the state, and that only the Nutritionist could order increased portions. He also refused to advocate with the state for a change in the policy. He did state that the Department felt that youth were receiving enough food, but were refusing to eat some of it. He claimed that the food vendors at the halls were monitoring what food was being discarded in order to determine what items to remove from the menu. But, the YJC pointed out that a 2,000 calorie a day diet for adolescent boys that typically eat as much as 5,000 calories a day would lead to weight loss regardless of whether or not all the food was consumed. On December 19th, the YJC met with Lisa Garcia, the Superintendent of Sylmar Juvenile Hall and Dennis Carroll, the Probation Bureau Chief in charge of the halls. They promised to investigate the entering and current weight to one of the units in order to advocate for more food if needed. We hope to receive their findings by the end of March.

Families know they risk arrest, losing visiting privileges, even refilling on their son/daughter if they're caught bringing contraband into the halls. But, they are even more concerned that their children are disappearing. They stuff burgers, sandwiches, even bar-be-qued ribs into their bras and pockets before visiting. Even the Probation staff fails to uphold these regulations. They look the other way when the youth inhale the contraband food in the visiting room.

Despite the fact that many youth have drug-related arrests, youth and/or parents beg for drug programs, and/or youth are high or drunk when arrested, youth have little to no access to drug education and treatment while they are locked up.

During the time their children were locked up, the Barnes parents asked repeatedly for drug treatment, but never got it. Said Mr. Barnes – “We have already paid for juvenile halls and camps through our taxes. This is double taxation! And what are we getting for all that money?! If I treated my children the way the Department of Probation has treated them, I would be arrested for child abuse!”

The Need for Family Resource Centers Staffed by Community Based Organizations, Youth and Families

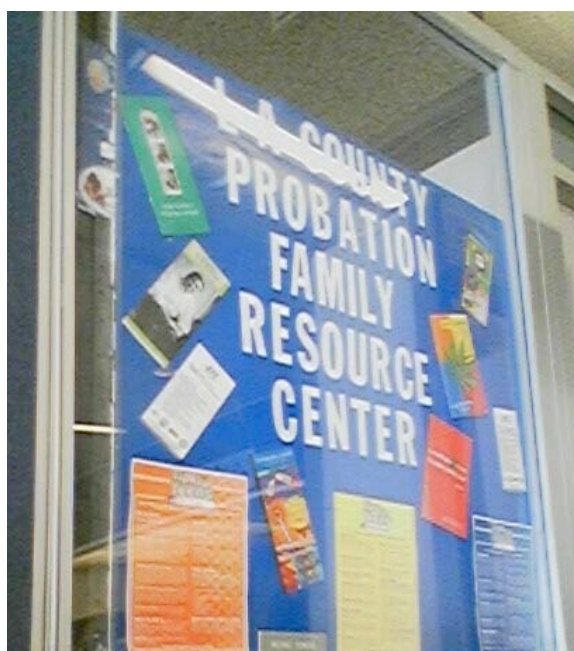
Several years ago, the Youth Justice Coalition started pushing Probation to create Family Resource Centers at the halls and courts. The effort led to the creation of some programs. Unfortunately, it didn't go as far as youth and parents had envisioned. Despite the best intentions of many Probation officers who work to create family outreach and resource opportunities, their programs are given inadequate space and resources.

At Los Padrinos, the Resource Center includes a TV and a few posters. A staff sits in a small office to handle appointments. In the morning at the start of court, she comes out of the office, slips a video into the VCR and returns to her office. It is a fifteen-minute video that is dry and contains a huge amount of technical information on court and Probation procedures. Buried deep in that video is most parents' only chance of learning about being billed: there is one line in the video that speaks *very briefly and very quickly* about the billing of families. Most families don't even watch the video in the large open area at the front of the court entrance where it is competing with the sounds and sights of lawyers meeting with defendants' families, bathroom and snack shop traffic, shouts from court officers calling people's names for particular courts, and screenings at the metal detector.

The Probation staff might have better results if they left their desks to ensure that families fully understand the billing policy, and how to avoid immense financial hardships in the future. Yet, as mentioned above, of the 66 families interviewed by the YJC, all but 9 said they received no warning from Probation that they would be charged prior to receiving the first bill. To Erick Lima, it's ironic that the juvenile hall here is named Los Padrinos – or Godparents, with the phrase painted beneath its name, “Those who care for the children.” “Probation told me to get a job, don't miss a meeting, go to school or we'll lock you back up. Everything was a threat. They never gave me any connections to school or programs. I had to do that on my own. My (18-year-old) friend got me hooked up to school, and school got me a job, and went with me to court. I really don't know what families are paying for.”

The billing of families is ultimately a human rights issue.

Chief Taylor stated in his August 28th meeting with youth and families and again at the February 28th hearing that he “wants to charge families, especially rich families.” Bureau Chiefs Carroll and Smythe also said this in conversations with the Youth Justice Coalition. But, spend a day in any of the County's juvenile halls, camps or courts and you can count on one hand the number of white youth you see. Given the class and (usually racial) advantages wealthy families have with both police and courts, they are much more likely to receive alternatives to detention, and if they are taken to juvenile hall, move more quickly through court with



Top: Families waiting for court at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall in Downey. At the front, on a small screen TV, plays a long, technical video outlining the court and detention process. Buried deep in the tape is a single line about billing. Middle: Erick Lima waits for court at Los Padrinos. Behind him is the juvenile hall's quote – “We care for the children.” Bottom: The sign outside the closed door to the tiny office that makes up the “Family Resource Center” at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall. Outside the court's waiting area is packed with parents. The YJC has argued that youth and parents with system experience, along with community-based organizations, should staff the resource centers.

private defense attorneys. Therefore, billing unfairly impacts poor and working class families and families of color. The Youth Justice Coalition has argued with the Probation Department and the Board of Supervisors that this has huge implications for DMC – Disproportionate Minority Contact – (the justice system’s term to describe when people of color are treated differently than whites).

For Ruth Mayfield, the verbal and written threats about the bill that she received from Probation in the spring collided with the sudden and unexpected death of her partner. As she got full custody of two additional children, she also lost half her income, and within the month was forced to move from her house. Like Scrooge, Probation was there – even in the midst of financial crisis and deep mourning – looking to get paid. No one from Probation ever expressed any condolences to the children for the loss of their parent or to Mayfield for the loss of her life’s greatest love and support. And, not surprisingly, some of the raw and desperate anger the family felt was focused on teenage Marcel, not on L.A. County.

Because, more than anything else, the billing of families unravels any hopes of meaningful reunification that is so desperately needed if youth are to progress on the inside, and succeed once released. When youth return home from lock-up, avoiding future arrests depends most on positive family connection and support. But the bills – especially when families are struggling to raise their children on too few resources – serve to drive a wedge of conflict and resentment between the young person returning home and their family.

Imagine being 13 or 14 and living with the anger, frustration, stress and guilt that mounting bills cause your entire family. Imagine being that young with a debt for incarceration that rivals what wealthy youth are putting away for college or a first home. What does this mean for that young person’s future emotional and economic stability?

Michael Gonzalez is detained at Camp Gonzalez and worries “daily” about the bills his family receives. “My mom works two jobs to raise me and my sister. It causes a lot of tension and arguments. My rebellion is costing them; that doesn’t seem fair to me. I want to go home, but this money is stressing everybody, and I know it will make it hard to go back with my family.”

Chino, 21, (who asked that his last name be withheld), explained to Chief Taylor at the August 28th meeting, that his mother still blames him for the financial hardships caused by his detention in L.A. County and San Diego juvenile halls seven years ago. He and his mother barely see each other.

Jose Castro just turned 18, and is working full time at MacDonald’s to pay off more than \$2,000 in bills from his detention at Sylmar and Eastlake Juvenile Halls. His father was working a non-union, construction job with the L.A. Unified School District, but was recently laid off. He has a little brother. “My mom and dad are both mad at me for the bill. Every time it comes in the mail, they put me down. ‘We don’t have enough to eat, and we have to pay this for you.’ I feel bad about it every day. The other day, I bought a whole lot of food for my family. I felt that them eating was more important than making a payment to Probation.”

Carlos “Flaco” Burns is 28, and “graduated” from the halls to County Jail, Salinas Valley and Soledad State Prisons. “You know they (Probation) never prepared me for anything but a CDCR (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) number. I came out the halls banging harder than ever, and went on to spend my entire young life behind bars. The whole time I was inside and out, my mom struggled to pay those bills even though we bounced from house to house and spent time homeless.” Burns is still paying off the last \$1,200 of an \$8,000 bill that began in 1994 when he was 13, and included incarceration at Camps Smith, Challenger and Resnick, and at Dorothy Kirby. As an adult, he was never billed. Young people who come home from long-term incarceration without degrees or links to work, are held financially accountable in ways that adults are not.

California is the richest state in the nation and the fifth richest economy in the world. But, L.A. County, despite its immense fortune as the wealthiest state’s wealthiest region, also has the highest number of children living in poverty, the nation’s largest homeless population, the largest number of children living in foster care, the country’s largest gap between rich and poor, and the world’s largest juvenile hall and youth prison populations. For the Salcedo family, the Mayfield family, the Barnes family and thousands of other families struggling to make it in L.A.’s toughest and most violent communities, it’s time that Probation lived up to its mission to serve *rather than profit* from youth and their families.



Ruth Mayfield’s extended family gathered at her rented home in South Central Los Angeles to celebrate the life and mourn the passing of her partner. She was suddenly responsible for two additional children with half the income. A few months after the funeral, the family was forced to move. Mayfield has received no reduction in her bill from Probation.