

Mark Lipkin & Terry Brodie: A prison by another name: Is it worth the cost?

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Mark Lipkin and Terry Brodie
Other Voices

Over the last decade, Nevada County has seen a dramatic drop in the rate of juvenile crime and incarceration.

The Carl F. Bryan II Juvenile Hall opened in 2003 with a capacity to hold 60 youth. It now has an average daily population of just five.

In the meantime, the cost to run the facility skyrocketed to reach a peak of more than \$530,000 annually per youth. Although the facility is considered to be in many ways state-of-the-art, two separate Nevada County Civil Grand Juries recommended the facility's closure.

Instead, the Nevada County Probation Department is proposing to cement the facility's use as a juvenile prison. Its plan continues the detention of Nevada County youth, increases the incarcerated population by leasing beds to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the state of Nevada, and obscures these developments by adding the words "Youth Center" to its title. Although the probation department plans to also provide youth programming for non-incarcerated youth, any benefits of such services are far outweighed by the harms of continued juvenile incarceration.

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Research on the impacts of incarceration is clear. Incarceration does not make communities safer or healthier. In reality, incarcerating youth leads to a higher incidence of adult criminality and incarceration, reduces employment prospects, hinders educational attainment, and negatively impacts a range of both physical and mental health outcomes.

Simply changing the name of the juvenile hall will not help the young people incarcerated within its walls. Nevada County deserves a better answer for its youth, one aligned with both years of research and the needs of its community.

A plan to truly repurpose the facility is necessary, and a path forward exists — one which both ensures the end of youth incarceration in Nevada County and bolsters the county's ability to meet the needs of its constituents. Nevada County residents know what is best for their community, and their voices are palpably missing from this conversation. Residents' voices, especially those impacted by juvenile incarceration, must be at the forefront of any plan to repurpose the juvenile hall.

[Impact Justice's recent report, "Nothing Good Happens in There: Research and Strategies for Repurposing Youth Detention Facilities in California,"](#) provides a guide for local leaders to begin the process of repurposing detention facilities while ensuring the community's needs are understood and met.

Nevada County has the opportunity to thoughtfully engage with residents, families, and youth to radically transform a facility rooted in an outdated understanding of youth development and crime. This report can help the county solicit input and create a plan that is reflective of community needs.

We recognize that Nevada County faces many important considerations as it undertakes this momentous shift. Allocating funds for the building, ensuring the livelihood of juvenile hall employees, and effectively responding to violence perpetrated by youth are all factors county leaders and residents must address.

Other jurisdictions have encountered these same challenges and found multiple paths to overcome them. San Francisco's recently introduced legislation to shutter their juvenile hall can serve as an example. Their plan expands community-based alternatives to incarceration and invests in small, non-institutional settings for youth who must be removed from their homes due to safety concerns.

We believe Nevada County is capable of engaging in a similar, community-driven process that meets the needs of the youth who are currently incarcerated and county residents as a whole.

Closing the last youth detention facility in a county is difficult. Repurposing it to better serve the community may be even harder. But solutions do exist. Now's the time for Nevada County to do what's best for its youth: End youth incarceration and invest in community-based alternatives.

Mark Lipkin is a research analyst with Impact Justice, a national innovation and research center advancing new ideas and solutions for justice reform. He is based in Oakland. Terry Brodie recently retired from Silver Springs Alternative High School, where she was the guidance/crisis counselor and piloted the Alternatives to Violence Project. She lives in Nevada County.