

Supervisors direct probation to close Juvenile Hall

March 27, 2023



The Board of Supervisors has directed Chief Probation Officer Lonnie Reyman to close the unoccupied Juvenile Hall. The vote to shutter the 23-year-old building on Williams Drive was 3-2. Supervisors Dean Wilson, Joey Borges and Chris Howard voted yes. Supervisors Valerie Starkey and Darrin Short voted no.

“The decision to close the Hall is very difficult but the least impacting of several more severe options,” Reyman said.

There are presently three youths in custody, all in Humboldt County. Reyman states those minors are receiving services identical to what Del Norte County would offer. Housing will continue to be dependent on capacity. With the inability to recruit staff, keeping the hall open remains unsustainable, according to Reyman.

The chief probation officer reported to supervisors:

- There have been six recruitment cycles since July of 2020 essentially open until filled.

- There have been 93 qualified applicants in almost 33 months of open recruitment.
- 35 showed up for initial testing and interviews.
- 13 succeeded to final interviews.
- 11 employment offers were extended.
- Two qualified applicants accepted offers.
- At present, there are six open positions available in Del Norte County Probation.

Reyman continued, “Staff impact is significant. The workload is uncertain. This uncertainty breeds low morale. The special purpose schedule is not a sustainable model.”

The nine employees assigned to the hall will be reduced down to a staff of five officers and one supervisor who will be assigned to work in custody, transportation and programs. The two cook positions will discontinue.

Paul Dillard, chairman of the Del Norte Juvenile Justice Commission called the closing. “...a sad day for the county. It makes no sense not to staff Juvenile Hall. People just don’t give a damn.”

He questioned the common problem as to why the attrition rate was so high and recruitment was so difficult.

The process of a reduction in the workforce must be reviewed by the employees’ union.

There remains approximately 25 youths under Probation Department authority who will continue the non-incarcerated supervision of these minors.

Supervisor Short asked Reyman if hall operations can be suspended rather than closed, to avoid anticipated red tape in re-opening the hall if and when staff can be recruited and the state amends its protocol on how youths who offend or present a danger to themselves or the community may be disciplined.

Reyman stated the status of the hall is listed as “unoccupied,” which would satisfy the Board of State Community Corrections if conditions improve in staff recruitment. Nonetheless, Supervisor Short voted no on the motion to give direction to probation to close Juvenile Hall.

Del Norte County now joins Trinity, Siskiyou, Lassen, Lake, Glenn and Modoc counties, which have removed their juvenile halls across Northern California. Humboldt remains the least geographically-challenged county and is contiguous with Del Norte.

The tentative schedule is to close Juvenile Hall by June 30, pending resolution of union grievances against those displaced.

Chief Probation Officer Reyman recommends the Board of Supervisors relinquish its long-standing defensive position on juvenile detention or go on the offense to create an environment that Del Norte County can sustain long-term.

This story is a continuing one.

Additional reports will follow.