

PROBATION DEPARTMENT

“Protection, Service & Accountability”

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Kim Barrett
Chief Probation Officer

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April 23, 2007

The Honorable Gloria Romero
Member, California State Senate
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 313
Sacramento, California 95814

SENATE BILL 802 (Romero)

POSITION: OPPOSE

Dear Senator Romero:

As Chief Probation Officer for San Luis Obispo County, I am writing to respectfully communicate my opposition to your Senate Bill 802, as amended on April 17, 2007, relating to alternative education.

SB 802 will effectively eliminate core elements of the existing system of alternative education programs that has developed over the past 40 years to meet the educational needs of at-risk students. These students, in addition to requiring significant supplemental educational services, pose significant school and community safety challenges. Important elements of the system we see today grew out of “Zero Tolerance” policies adopted to help assure a safe teaching and learning environment for all students and school personnel.

Specifically, County Community schools serve students who are on parole or probation, expelled or suspended, chronically truant, or homeless. Senate Bill 802 proposes to (1) eliminate current alternative education programs-- including important statutory provisions which allow for county probation departments to directly refer students to county community school programs and (2) block grant existing alternative program funding to school districts.

The current system of alternative education programs comprises a continuum of educational services with options that align services based on the severity of the student’s needs. Further, the existing structure ensures that the funding for these services follows the student irrespective of where that student is placed,

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and helps assure that resources are directed specifically to meet those needs. This bill creates a block-grant funding structure that will almost certainly erode targeted funding for the 1% of our current K-12 students population that represents the greatest threat to school and public safety.

Senate Bill 802 eliminates the existing service system supporting these students without providing a better alternative structure for our most vulnerable youth. In its place, Senate Bill 802 would require local educators to develop a plan for improving the quality of alternative education schools and programs in the county. As drafted, the bill leaves students who are currently served in alternative education settings without a safety net.

Community schools are a critical and successful part of the continuum of educational services offered in the California public school system. We believe that the provisions of Senate Bill 802, if implemented, would significantly compromise the quality and effectiveness of those services and could very well compromise the safety of our schools and communities.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Please feel free to contact my office should you have any questions regarding our opposition to SB 802.

Sincerely,

Kim Barrett
Chief Probation Officer