



County of Del Norte
Board of Supervisors
981 "H" Street, Ste. 200
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August 23, 2022

The Honorable Mark Stone
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0029

Re: AB 503 (Probation/Wards) - Opposition

Dear Assemblymember Stone:

On behalf of the County of Del Norte County, we are writing this letter to express our concerns with Assembly Bill 503 as currently written.

This bill treats misdemeanors and felonies the same and applies to youth who are made wards of the court, including youth charged with WIC 707(b) offenses such as murder, rape, arson, and robbery among other offenses. These youth have been identified as often having higher criminogenic needs that require focused and individualized responses to balance and meet the safety and treatment needs of these youth.

The arbitrary nature of designating six months wardship for all cases will not accommodate the length of certain treatment or programs, such as sex offender programs. An unintended consequence of this bill will be more stringent alternative dispositions by courts and prosecutors to potentially include adult court or a longer custodial sanctions.

The process currently proposed in the bill sets a presumption for discharge at six months for all non-custodial wardship cases (misdemeanor and felony). This six-month presumption is shorter in duration than existing diversion or Deferred Entry of Judgement (DEJ) (which is a minimum of 12 months) programs. The bill establishes a probation term for wardship, which is deemed at the higher end of the juvenile continuum, yet for a duration shorter than diversion. This bill will force youth to consider a formal probation disposition term added to their criminal record than the less intrusive diversion or DEJ options.

Our Del Norte County Probation Department is committed to helping youth meet their court ordered conditions and to receive treatment and services they need to balance and meet safety considerations and a youth's rehabilitative needs. Now is not the time to be further removing tools from probation and the courts to address the needs of youth that come before the court, especially for cases involving the most serious conduct that compromises public safety.

For these reasons, the County respectfully opposes AB 503 as it will undermine the individualized approach to balancing considerations to help youth create positive and sustainable pathways for their future while protecting our communities.

Regards,

Gerry Hemmingsen
Chairman

CC: Governor Gavin Newsom
Senator Mike McGuire
Assemblymember Jim Wood
Karen Lange, Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange



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