



Settlement of Landmark Lawsuit Alleging Failure to Provide Education to Youth Detained at Camp Challenger

LOS ANGELES, November 4, 2010 – The parties today announced the settlement of a landmark class action lawsuit filed against Los Angeles County agencies alleging the failure to provide a constitutionally adequate education to youth detained at Camp Challenger, the County’s largest juvenile detention facility.

Under the settlement agreement announced today, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and the Los Angeles Probation Department (Probation) will work extensively with a team of nationally renowned experts to implement systemic program reforms at Challenger and Christa McAuliffe High School in order to provide the required education and special education to the hundreds of youth who are detained there. The reform will cover at least 13 major areas, including literacy, instruction, transition, special education, and aftercare. The reforms will also focus on leadership at Challenger and sustainability, in order to ensure that the changes implemented as part of the settlement are permanent. The experts who will work hand-in-hand with the Challenger team under this agreement are some of the nation’s leaders in the development of educational and rehabilitative programs for youth in juvenile detention settings.

“This settlement will be transformative for the youth and staff at Challenger, and represents more than just a resolution to a case. It represents our collective commitment to give these kids the education they need to succeed in life. We applaud the County of Los Angeles, the Probation Department and LACOE for working with us to ensure that the kids at Camp Challenger receive this chance. ” says Shawna L. Parks, Legal Director for the Disability Rights Legal Center.

The settlement provides a host of other of programmatic changes at Challenger, including creation of the Challenger Reform Taskforce that will be responsible for providing information and feedback relevant to the reform efforts at Challenger and serving as a liaison to individuals at Challenger and community stakeholders. In addition, LACOE and Probation will develop a literacy program, including a lending library program and librarian, and a career and technical education program, services which were previously unavailable to the youth.

“This settlement represents a long overdue promise to the young people at Challenger: a promise to ensure that they receive the tools to learn to read and write, to have the opportunity to gain marketable skills, and to successfully transition back into their



communities and schools,” said Laura Faer, Directing Attorney, Children’s Rights Project, Public Counsel Law Center. “The County has taken an important step toward reforming a broken system that has been failing our children for far too long. With this settlement and the serious commitment of all the parties, we have the opportunity to transform Challenger from one of the worst education systems in the nation, to a model for other jurisdictions to follow.”

Importantly, the settlement also provides for intensive reading services for the youth who were detained at Challenger since January 12, 2008. As a result, these youth will be able to access educational services at no cost in order to help them regain the educational ground they lost while at Challenger.

LACOE and Probation will also reform Challenger’s prior disciplinary and solitary confinement policies to ensure that students receive an appropriate education as required by state law.

“From its very inception, Challenger has been the black hole of Los Angeles’ juvenile justice system, a hellish place where every child has been left behind. A sentence to Challenger has more often than not been the first step to a lifetime sentence to California’s penal system. The historic settlement announced today will implement an action plan prepared by seven of our nation’s leading experts in the successful delivery of educational and rehabilitative services in juvenile correctional institutions. It promises nothing less than a complete makeover of Challenger from a factory of despair to a school for hope,” said Mark Rosenbaum, chief counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

This lawsuit, *Casey A., et al., v. Jon R. Gundry, et al.* (Civil Action No. CV 10-00192 GHK (FMOx)), was filed on January 12, 2010. The settlement will not become final until it is formally approved by the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. It also includes four years of monitoring to ensure the reforms are implemented.

Named as defendants in the lawsuit are the Los Angeles County Probation Department, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (which operates schools at county probation camps and juvenile halls), and several county education officials, including the superintendent of the Office of Education, the director of that agency’s juvenile court schools, and the current and former principals of the probation department’s Challenger Memorial Youth Center.

Counsel in the lawsuit include the ACLU of Southern California, Disability Rights Legal Center, Public Counsel, and the ACLU National Prison Project.



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