

## **Public Comment in support of rescinding Juvenile Court Rule 7.16:**

As a Juvenile Probation Officer/Counselor for 10 years and an employee of Juvenile Court for over 20 years, working primarily with at-risk youth, I've seen many changes in our system. Most of those changes had a positive impact, but some have failed to find a logical "middle ground" between the past and the future of juvenile justice. Although I believe JuCR 7.16 is well-intentioned and agree detention has been overused historically, I've seen the detrimental impact JuCR 7.16 had for youth and their families. I left probation recently and took a voluntary pay cut, partially because I felt I was being asked to do my job with my hands tied behind my back. I was fielding more and more calls from parents who were equally frustrated, feeling powerless to help their children. As I had run out of options from my own resource pool, all I could suggest was that they call their legislators and express their concerns.

For example, I worked with a youth who had a very serious Fentanyl addiction. He was living on the street and his parents only knew the general area in which he stayed. He had no contact with me and only very limited contact with his parents. He was on court ordered supervision, but I couldn't have a conversation with him let alone get him treatment for his substance abuse or to court for violations of his probation. I requested warrants multiple times but could not obtain one because of JuCR 7.16. Historically, a warrant would have been granted due to the confluence of multiple factors: his whereabouts being unknown, his lack of contact with probation or family, his lack of engagement in the case management process, and most importantly, because he was deemed a danger to himself. I would have utilized the warrant to get him picked up by law enforcement (who encountered him frequently) and placed into detention long enough to get him safely detoxed and into an inpatient program. By the time a warrant was finally procured, he had fallen deep into his addiction. He was arrested on an adult offense and his supervision was closed. His time in Juvenile Court should have been used for rehabilitation but was wasted thanks to JuCR. 7.16.

You may counter my arguments with, "Detention shouldn't be used as a detox." No, it shouldn't. However, the complete lack of detox beds for juveniles in Washington State makes this a necessity. If more intensive care is needed, the youth is sent out to a hospital for treatment. You may counter with, "Detention is a traumatic experience for youth." I would agree it can be for some, but when you consider a youth like the one I'm referencing, I can guarantee the trauma he's experiencing on the street is by far more detrimental. Consider withdrawal without medical intervention, living out in the elements, physical and sexual assaults, potential for overdose, and exposure to blood borne pathogens. I would also urge you to visit your local detention center. I can only speak on behalf of Snohomish County, but I know our staff to be caring individuals who do everything they can to make youth feel safe and respected. Youth get to participate in activities including school, gardening, cooking, dance, art, yoga, etc. They have access to nursing staff and a mental health counselor, but can also be connected with housing advocates, domestic violence and sexual assault advocates, substance abuse treatment counselors, etc. We go out of our way to make sure they have meaningful contact with family and support from members of their chosen religion. Staff at Juvenile Court become lasting mentors to the

youth they serve; we receive letters, phone calls, and personal visits from youth long after they leave our care, thanking us for the support we provided.

A more general trend I've experienced, is seeing youth less and less concerned about following their court orders. They have quickly learned that consequences are few, boundaries lax, and if they just avoid us long enough, they may never have to see a court room. Is this the kind of message we want to send our youth? That consequences only exist for juveniles responsible enough to face them? Or to make them think they're getting away with something until they are later charged as adults because their juvenile jurisdiction expired while they were MIA. Please rescind JuCR 7.16 before more youth fall through the cracks.

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