

County supervisors to consider ending ORR contract on Tuesday

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy**

Yolo County supervisors on Tuesday will consider ending the county's agreement with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement to house unaccompanied refugee minors at the county's juvenile detention center.

The Board of Supervisors had been scheduled to consider ending the program at their last meeting but the matter was continued to April 3.

Yolo County's chief probation officer, Brent Cardall, is recommending terminating the contract under which the county has provided beds for up to 24 undocumented youths a year since 2008. The contract requires that only youths who have been deemed a danger to themselves or others or have been charged with or convicted of a crime be housed at the Woodland facility.

But the program has come under harsh criticism and has been caught up in a lawsuit over allegations that youths who don't fit the criteria are being detained there.

Cardall is recommending that the contract between the county and the federal government be terminated for several reasons, including:

* Often ORR youths placed in Yolo County have been subject to significant trauma, community violence and marginalization before they come here and exhibit a high rate of challenging behaviors, increased mental illness, and at times, physical aggression that has resulted in staff injuries from assaults by ORR youths. In order to address these serious behaviors, increased staffing would be needed, according to Cardall. Over the 2016 and 2017 years, the county's data has shown that ORR youths are three times more likely to assault staff than non-ORR youths.

* Undocumented children placed in the Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility through the ORR program who commit crimes while at the facility can be criminally charged. This creates the potential for the youths to fall under the jurisdiction of local probation supervision, and creates placement issues and unfunded costs for the county.

* Evolving legislation may impact Yolo County if this contract continues. New laws such as SB 54, the sanctuary state law, or SB 29, prohibiting localities in California from entering into, or expanding immigration housing contracts with the federal government, are recent examples of this, according to county staff. Although neither bill directly applies to this specific contract, the spirit of new legislation indicates a state-wide movement to separate local government from federal immigration issues.

Cardall will ask the board on Tuesday to terminate the contract while retaining staffing and operations support for up to 16 Yolo County Superior Court detained minors.

The ORR contract pays the county about \$3 million per year to house the minors and terminating the contract will result in civil and sworn position layoffs.

The board is scheduled to consider the matter at 9 am. on Tuesday in the Board of Supervisors chambers, 625 Court St., in Woodland.

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net or 530-747-8051. Follow her on Twitter at @ATernusBellamy.