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April 9, 2018

The Honorable Reginald B. Jones-Sawyer, Sr.  
Chair, Assembly Public Safety Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 111  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2010 (Chau) – Juvenile facilities: chemical agents  
AAP-CA Position: Support

Dear Assembly Member Jones-Sawyer,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA), representing over 5,000 California pediatricians, supports AB 2010 (Chau). This bill will protect youth in the juvenile justice system from the unnecessary and counterproductive use of chemical agents and bring California more closely in line with national best practice on this issue.

The National Institute of Justice describes chemical spray as “inducing an almost immediate burning sensation of the skin and burning, tearing, and swelling of the eyes. When it is inhaled, the respiratory tract is inflamed...temporarily restricting breathing in short, shallow breaths.” These effects are particularly severe for young people with respiratory or cardiovascular issues, including asthma.

Research indicates that chemical agents are particularly harmful for youth with mental health issues – a troubling fact given that the rate of PTSD among youth in the juvenile justice system is eight times that of youth in the general population. Moreover, when staff carry and use chemical agents in a juvenile facility, it impedes the development of a trusting relationship between staff and youth – a relationship that is crucial to the rehabilitative mission of the juvenile justice system.

Because of these harmful effects and the negative impact on rehabilitation, jurisdictions across the country have limited the use of chemical agents in juvenile facilities, and nationally-accepted best practice standards counsel against their use. A 2011 national survey of correctional administrative staff by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA) revealed that only 12% of agencies surveyed authorized staff to carry pepper spray in secure facilities and only 29% of agencies authorize the use of chemical restraints at all. California was one of only six states surveyed that permitted staff to carry OC spray on their persons.

AB 2010 (Chau) protects young people and brings California more closely in line with national practice regarding the use of chemical agents by restricting the use of chemical agents to situations in which they are necessary and approved by a facility administrator as a last resort to suppress a riot, by barring facility staff from carrying chemical agents on their person, and by requiring documentation of any use of chemical agents and the subsequent decontamination procedures used.

AB 2010 is a sensible step to align California with the rest of the country and to adopt accepted professional practices that help ensure a safe, supportive, and rehabilitative environment for youth in juvenile facilities.

Pediatricians across the state urge you to vote AYE on AB 2010 (Chau). Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kris E. Calvin" with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish at the end.

Kris Calvin

Chief Executive Officer, American Academy of Pediatrics, California

cc: Assembly Human Services Committee Members  
Office of Honorable Ed Chau, California State Assembly (Author)  
Lydia Bourne, AAP-CA Lobbyist