



August 17, 2015

Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 94229-0051

SB 124 (LENO): Solitary Confinement of Youth
AAP-CA POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Appropriation Committee Members,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California, representing the 5,000 board-certified pediatrician members of all four California AAP regional chapters statewide (Ch. 1 – Northern California, Ch. 2 – Greater Los Angeles, Ch. 3 – San Diego, and Ch. 4 – Orange County), strongly supports Senator Leno’s proposed legislation SB 124 (Leno). This bill establishes clear limits on the use of solitary confinement for youth detained in juvenile facilities. It would 1) allow the use of solitary confinement only in situations in which an individual poses an immediate and substantial risk of harm to the security of the facility, to himself or herself, or to others; 2) limit the time spent in solitary confinement to the minimum required to address the risk, but no longer than 4 hours; and 3) prohibit the use of solitary confinement for any juvenile who is gravely disabled or who poses an imminent danger as a result of a mental disorder.

The AAP and its members recognize that “[youth] in the juvenile correctional system are a high-risk population who, in many cases, have unmet physical, developmental, and mental health needs.” The Academy advocates the use of developmentally appropriate environments for youth housed in correctional facilities. Prolonged solitary confinement clearly violates this principle. As the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has stated, “The potential psychiatric consequences of prolonged solitary confinement are well recognized and include depression, anxiety and psychosis. Due to their developmental vulnerability, juvenile offenders are at particular risk of such adverse reactions.”

The AAP has also expressed concern for the high rates of suicide among incarcerated youth, which some studies have identified as the leading cause of death in juvenile correctional facilities. The majority of suicides occur when youth are isolated or in solitary confinement, which further casts doubt on the appropriateness of solitary confinement for this vulnerable population.

By placing clear limits on the use of solitary confinement in juvenile facilities, SB 124 has the potential to reduce suicide, depression, and anxiety among youth in the juvenile correctional system. We, therefore, strongly **support** Senator Leno’s proposed legislation, SB 124 (Leno).

We thank you for your continued leadership and support of the children and families of California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'J' followed by a long horizontal line that tapers slightly to the right.

Joseph R. Rojas, MD
AAP-CA Senior Policy Advocate