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COMMISSIONERS

Dear County Commissioners,

It has come to our attention that there is a proposition to start sending Okanogan County juveniles at least three hours away to a maximum security facility. We believe in having our own Okanogan County Juvenile Detention Center for kids who live in Okanogan County. We have some concerns and questions about Okanogan County using Martin Hall as our juvenile detention facility.

It seems as though your main concern with regard to juvenile offenders is with cost of housing them. We think that the main concern should be what's best for kids in Okanogan County. What does Martin Hall have that would benefit juvenile inmates that our current facility doesn't have?

According to Mike Prager in *The Spokesman Review*, Spokane County stopped sending juveniles to Martin Hall. Instead, they found ways to keep kids out of jail. "Spokane has seen a large reduction in the use of its juvenile detention facility because of community-oriented corrections programs. Those include a structured alternative confinement school, community service, a girls' group, evening and weekend programs and parental involvement." We should look at Spokane as a role model and consider options other than jail.

Another main concern is about the impact of sending young people to a different location and placing them in a maximum security facility. Many families in small communities like ours don't have the resources or time to travel at least three hours only to be able to visit for a two hour period. According to Scott Hutsell, chair of the Martin Hall consortium board, "It's sad — not a lot of parents come to visit." Families aren't the only supporters that kids won't have access to. Kids at Martin Hall wouldn't be able to access counselors, supportive friends, or community members. Why would we put young adolescents into such a stressful situation? It's just punishing them, rather than trying to help them make better choices.

As we all know, Okanogan County already has issues with unemployment. Taking away our facility will only make the issue worse. People currently working at our facility would lose their jobs. It's better for our economy and the morale of our troubled youth to keep our facility local. Instead of closing our local facility, why not think of alternative ways to help kids and maybe create more jobs in doing so?

As teenagers residing in Okanogan County, we strongly urge you to not shut down the Okanogan County Juvenile Detention Facility and move our local kids to Martin Hall.

Sincerely,

Isabella Osborne

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*Students, Methow Valley Independent Learning Center*