



O K A N O G A N  
COUNTY COMMUNITY  
COALITION

March 14, 2016

Okanogan County Commissioners  
123 5<sup>th</sup> Ave N.  
Okanogan, WA 98840

Re: Martin Hall

I am concerned about the possibility of housing our incarcerated youth at Martin Hall – a facility over 140 miles away. There are pieces of this process that are completely objective where the analysis can be based on quantitative numbers, such as comparing actual cost. Other considerations are more qualitative and prompt us to ask the more difficult question of how we should care for the most vulnerable youth in our community to help them get back on the track to becoming productive and responsible citizens.

The first question is rather simple: Would Martin Hall save the county money? The “Juvenile Report” posted on the Planning Department Website lists the County cost in 2015 to operate the entire juvenile department was \$1,227,019. Many of the services in the \$1.2 million price tag will not cease by moving incarcerated youth to Martin Hall, such as probation, and restorative and therapeutic services. Per my request, Mr. Rabidou provided me with data showing the actual costs for the detention facility for 2015, which was \$745,821. While I do not see a proposed bed rate for 2016 from Martin Hall on the Planning Department’s website, the 2014 proposal lists rates ranging between \$140 and \$185 per diem each day. The detention caseload for 2015, using the lowest most conservative quoted number provided by Martin Hall (\$140), would have cost Okanogan County \$841,680 -- \$95,859 more than keeping these youth here in Okanogan County. The cost provided by Chelan County is less per day, but does not include transportation; thereby, likely costing more than Martin Hall to tax payers. The quantitative analysis is the easy part – it will potentially cost Okanogan County more to house our incarcerated youth outside of Okanogan County.

The more complicated analysis is the qualitative analysis – which asks is it the “right” thing to do. From my perspective, I would say that the basic costs are the least of the concerns when it comes to a county’s responsibility to respond to troubled juveniles. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 clearly outlines that unadjudicated youth should remain in the community whenever possible. Furthermore, it sets rehabilitation as a clear priority, which our local juvenile department and community organizations take very seriously. During the Commissioner’s meeting in February it was stated that Martin Hall would provide transportation (half-way) as part of the per diem fee. Logistically, how will they handle the 1:00am arrest? Will Martin Hall be on call 24/7 to get in the car at a moments notice to provide transportation from that halfway point? If not, where will these juveniles be held until transport is available? But most importantly, what will the treatment of these youth be during transportation?

Judge Culp stated very clearly that he will not allow video hearings in his courtroom, how many times will these youth be making a 6 hour round trip journey for required status hearings? We have heard juveniles will be chained and shackled during transportation for safety purposes. Some of these offenders are 12 years old or

younger. The very thought of any 12 year old child spending 6 hours chained and shackled during transportation makes my heart break. I do not believe this is humane, safe, or rehabilitative. Most importantly, it does not meet the stated goal to provide restorative and rehabilitative justice for our juveniles. By detaining juvenile offenders 140 miles away they will serve more time in punitive detention, if for no other reason than simply because of the travel time. Current research indicates that increasing a juvenile offenders time of incarceration increases the risk of future crime. Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Programs released a report in September 2005 including findings that traditional confinement in large correctional facilities results in high recidivism – as many as 50-70 percent of previously confined youth are rearrested within 1 or 2 years after release. This report strongly encourages community-based programs with minimal incarceration in order to minimize recidivism. Report after report shows that a punitive approach to juvenile justice raises the threat to public safety. The time a youth spends in secure detention or confinement is not just time away from negative factors that may have influenced his or her behavior. Detaining or confining youth may also widen the space between the youth and positive influences such as family, positive social support, and school. The answer is to combine community-based strategies and services to minimize the amount of time youth spend incarcerated. While not perfect, this balance raises the odds that these individuals will not be a future threat to public safety. To effectively achieve this balance juvenile offenders must receive high quality continuity of care. If the rehabilitative services begin in a facility 140 miles away, those services have to be reestablished upon release using local providers. Our current system allows for continuous and uninterrupted delivery of services, thereby increasing effectiveness.

The only costs I see regarding repair and/or remodel to the juvenile department are included in a proposal for a complete renovation of the courthouse, jail, juvenile, prosecutor, etc. Using this \$19+ number as an argument for abandoning local control of juvenile detention is misleading and inaccurate. Some of the repairs have been completed (upgrading windows and cell locking mechanisms). In response to Commissioner concerns regarding structural integrity and potential liability: there are two separate opinions from structural engineers stating that the facility is structurally sound and has structural integrity. I understand the facility may be in need of some repair. However, before abandoning local control of juvenile detention, we deserve a recent assessment of the necessary repairs, not a grant application from several years ago that encompasses multiple facilities.

While the above is a cursory and overly simplified analysis, it is clear that closing our local detention facility is bad idea. In the short term, and most obviously, it appears to cost more – not less. In the long term, extending the punitive incarceration time for juvenile offenders compromises our local public safety. Somewhere in the middle of these considerations sits our most underserved population – the juveniles. The idea of outsourcing our most troubled kids to a willing bidder is troubling and would indicate a complete failure of Okanogan County to accept responsibility to adequately serve the citizens of our community.

If there is any more information I can provide to assist you in making a decision, please feel free to contact me directly,

Sincerely,



Andi Ervin, CPP  
Executive Director