

Board of Directors

October 21, 2019

Patricia Lee
President
San Francisco Public
Defender's Office

Salinas City Council
200 Lincoln Ave
Salinas, CA 93901 (*sent by electronic transmission to Members*)

Jonathan Laba
Vice President
Contra Costa County
Office of the Public
Defender

Re: Support for MILPA Against Recent Attacks

Richard Braucher
Secretary
First District
Appellate Project

Dear Members of the Salinas City Council:

This letter is written on behalf of the Pacific Juvenile Defender Center to respond to recent attacks on MILPA, and specifically at Israel Villa -- aimed at severing the City's ties with the organization. We write to inform you of our experiences with MILPA and Israel, and to urge you not to take such action.

Kasie Lee
Chief Financial Officer
The Law Offices of
Kasie W. Lee

The Pacific Juvenile Defender Center is a non-profit, public interest organization offering support to more than 1,600 juvenile trial lawyers, appellate counsel, law school clinical programs and non-profit law centers to ensure quality representation for youth throughout California and around the country. We also participate in many efforts aimed at increasing protections for youth in the juvenile justice system, and assuring that they get the help they need to reach successful adulthood.

Elizabeth Calvin
Board Member
Human Rights Watch

Greg Feldman
Board Member
San Francisco Public
Defender's Office

We have worked with Israel and members of MILPA in several contexts, over a period of several years. First, in 2017-2018, they played an active role in helping to reform the Title 15 Minimum Standards for Juvenile Facilities that govern the care of young people in county juvenile facilities. MILPA members were always thoughtful, respectful and on point in their analyses of what was wrong and what could make things better in the regulations. We also worked closely with Israel Villa in "10 x 10," a year-long multi-disciplinary "think tank" that developed a juvenile law reform plan encompassing ten big ideas to be developed and implemented over a ten-year period. He was a core member of those efforts and his opinion was very much valued by the rest of the group.

Corene Kendrick
Board Member
Prison Law Office

Ji Seon Song
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Stanford Law School

Rourke Stacy
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Law Office of the Los
Angeles County
Public Defender

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Training Director*

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Director*

Arthur Bowie
JTAP Training Attorney

Amanda Butler
*JDRP Program
Coordinator*

In addition, we have worked with MILPA members as part of the California Alliance for Youth and Community Justice, which is a statewide group of community-based and advocacy organizations that works to improve funding and services for system involved youth. We also know that MILPA has been invited by major foundations and organizations, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Vera Foundation, to be a part of thinking through what is needed to improve things in the justice system. Juan Gomez and Israel are sought

after spokespersons on system reform, and as an organization, MILPA is well-respected in the field.

It is not surprising that tensions arise when a relatively young organization challenges longstanding practices -- that is to be expected. But to us, the proper response is not to dredge up character attacks designed to discredit the work of the organization. In terms of MILPA specifically, they are exactly the kind of group law enforcement should *want* to build relationships with. Many of those who work within MILPA have significant life experience with the justice system that makes them experts on the issues that need attention. It is just as much of a stretch for them to work with law enforcement as it is for law enforcement to work with them, but in our view the collaboration provides a critically important way for the system to become more effective and responsive to the needs of people in the community.

If there are particular allegations about behavior of concern, we suggest that MILPA and law enforcement talk them through rather than simply throwing out all of the work in progress. We urge the Council not to sever ties with MILPA or with Israel individually. Thank you for your consideration and please contact us if we may provide further information.

Sincerely yours,

Sue Burrell

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