

[Yolo County Supervisors to 'sever tie' with Office of Refugee Resettlement program](#)

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As Yolo County's agreement with the federal government to house unaccompanied refugee youth at the local Juvenile Detention Center approaches its Jan. 31 expiration, it appears the partnership will not continue.

After a night spent "tossing and turning," Chief Probation Officer Dan Fruchtenict made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors Tuesday, expressing his disinterest in renewal and seeking the members' direction on whether they wanted to apply for another three-year contract.

Since 2008, the county has reserved 24 of the JDF's 90 beds for young people who meet the Office of Refugee Resettlement's secure placement guidelines as part of the multi-million dollar deal. This includes those who have been charged with a crime or are considered a threat to themselves or others.

Fruchtenict took over as chief in January and says ORR-related tasks have eaten up 70-to-80% of his time.

Though recent adjustments addressing concerns such as funding and a rising number of aggressive, mentally ill minors being housed at the Woodland hall — leading to more staff injuries and use of sick time — seemed to be working, Fruchtenict reported an uptick in assaults against staff in September.

"In making my rounds in the last couple weeks as I normally do, I spoke to a fair share of the detention officers and when I asked them if we should proceed and if I should recommend to the board that we continue with the ORR contract not one of them recommended that," he said.

Fruchtenict went on to explain that ORR youth have an average stay of 54 days at the facility. With roughly a handful of teens currently placed in Yolo County's care, Fruchtenict shared how he feels about the changing demographics of the program's population.

"Because of their trauma, and mental health issues, I believe the federal government needs to invest in actual residential facilities to treat these youth ... at the end of the day we are a detention facility and while we do a great job of trying to stabilize the youth and work on their issues, I don't believe we're the ideal place for them to be housed and taken care of."

While ORR grant funding has benefitted the county and Yolo's juvenile justice program in ways including increased officer-to-youth ratios, enhanced staff training and resurfacing of the 14-year-old facility's recreation yard, the probation chief voiced his support for ending the relationship and implementing a staff-to-youth ratio of 1:8.

This would cause an estimated 22 layoffs and the creation of a sizeable budget gap, but ultimately maintain adequate staffing for programming and incident management, according to Fruchtenict.

The plan would also allow county staff to plan for the underpopulated JDF's future.

The potential to house adult offenders in the JDF along with Yolo youth when the two-year jail construction project gets underway in spring could serve as a cost avoidance and help offset the funding gap.

With Oscar Villegas recused due to a business conflict, the remaining four supervisors took turns sharing their opinions.

"I wish we could make it work, but to me it doesn't sound like it's working like it should and that's what bothers me," said Duane Chamberlain.

Jim Provenza said he didn't regret keeping the contract in place for so long but has had mounting concerns. He hoped the county could use its experience to leverage some changes within ORR.

"If we get out of the program now we can try to find the least restrictive placement for those who are still in and then I think we can communicate to ORR one of the reasons we're getting out of this is what they really need with the current group of juveniles is to develop residential mental health treatment and then there would be a much smaller number that would be in detention facilities if any."

He agreed with Fruchtenict that they should not renew, but wants staff to make every effort to find the least restrictive placements possible for youth and actively advocate for ORR to establish mental health placement.

Gary Sandy said Provenza's comments were on "exactly the right track" and noted that local youth need to be the board's first priority followed by staff who should always have the "protection they need so that they can go to work and home every day without injury "

Don Saylor was vocal about not want to continue either.

"It just gets more and more clear that it's time to sever that tie," he suggested.

"That will allow some \$7.5 or 8 million that the federal government has contracted with us to provide appropriate settings for those who require residential mental healthcare," he continued. "Unless anyone says I heard them wrong I think we have four members saying that we are not interested in renewing the contract."

Saylor was not completely on-board with Fruchtenict's recommended action, however, and indicated he wanted to revisit repurposing the JDF and contracting with outside counties to house Yolo's small number of incarcerated youth.

Price estimates and cost savings for many options post-ORR were not readily available as of Tuesday.

The ORR program's only other secure placement facility in the nation is in Virginia.