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Closing Down the Hall: San Francisco's Efforts to Redefine Juvenile Justice

A Capstone Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

Madison Bliss Holland

May 2021

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and express deep appreciation to the ten participants who contributed to my research and made this project possible.

Krea Gomez – Director of Local Initiatives - Young Women’s Freedom Center

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Katherine Miller – Chief Probation Officer - San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department

Shamann Walton – President - San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Daniel Macallair – Executive Director - Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

Nate Ford – Director and Founder - San Francisco Rebels Basketball

Sheryl Davis – Executive Director - Human Rights Commission

Lyslynn Lacoste – Executive Director - BMAGIC

Mollie Brown – Budget and Data Analyst - Juvenile Justice Providers Association

Carolyn Goossen – Director of Local Policy - San Francisco Public Defender’s Office

Abstract

Significant research has demonstrated that juvenile prisons are obsolete for the following reasons: they fail to rehabilitate children and prevent future crime, they perpetuate pervasive abuse and trauma, they disproportionately target and further marginalize children of color, and the cost of youth incarceration has skyrocketed to unimaginable amounts. In light of all of these findings, in 2019, San Francisco became the first city in the nation to pass legislation to close its juvenile hall. In order to understand how this was possible and to understand its implications for other cities looking to engage in similar work, I asked the following question: What strategies and techniques did San Francisco activists engage in to successfully pass the legislation to close its juvenile hall and what can be learned from the process of its implementation? In this thesis, I argue that the passing of this legislation was made possible by a cooperative effort during a unique political window of opportunity. However, drawing on Savannah Shange's ideas of a *progressive dystopia* and *carceral progressivism*, I demonstrate that the process of implementation has revealed a series of tensions between stakeholders expressed shared values and their actualization. This project is important because it demonstrates the difficulties of not perpetuating carceral practices even in a place as progressive as San Francisco. This project highlights the need to go beyond the appearance of progressive politics and to actually do the work of defining values in practical terms that can bring about transformative justice.

Introduction

In the 1980s and 90s, the “tough on crime” approach dominated the American political and social sphere. This rhetoric led to the development of policy that criminalized children, created draconian school environments, and perpetuated racism. There was increased pressure from the public on politicians and school administrators to develop harsher consequences for behavior that would typically be seen as “normal” developmentally, a greater demand for police presence on campus, and an overall shift away from understanding youth behavior with empathy. Schools increased their surveillance and lockdown measures and hired more police officers making many campuses feel more like detention facilities than learning environments. Schools developed new disciplinary policies that mandated harsher punishments with no room for context or understanding of the student or the situation and new or updated juvenile prisons were developed at rapid rates. In short, the late 20th century marked a cultural shift in how young people are treated, the types of mistakes they are allowed to make, and how “misbehavior” or crime is handled.

An important piece of legislation that institutionalized these practices in schools was the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This bill required states that received federal funds for education to adopt zero-tolerance discipline policies — school disciplinary policies that layout predetermined consequences for specific types of student misbehavior (Winter 2020). At a fundamental level, this bill was driven by serious concerns around the increase of school shootings and mandated the expulsion of students for carrying or bringing a weapon to school. Although cases of mass shootings present a clearer need for serious intervention, there are many cases where students bring weapons to school out of fear for their own safety. Once enacted, it became clear that the rigidity of the mandates in this bill was problematic and left little room for

understanding more complex and nuanced situations with young people that are driven more by environmental and cultural factors than by ill intentions. Even more problematic was the fact that states decided to implement zero-tolerance laws that went even further requiring the suspension and expulsion of students for various offenses related to fighting, defiant behavior, insubordination, tardiness, and more (Winter 2020). For example, a student in San Diego, California was suspended for “arguing and insubordination” after refusing to cut out or remove the braids in his hair, a style that was deemed to be out of compliance with the school’s dress code (Taket 2020). Not only is this punishment excessive, but it also appears to be racially driven and reflects a lack of cultural awareness, disproportionately affecting students of color.

The effects of these policies were exacerbated by the increased presence of police officers in public schools across the country, made possible by expanded federal funding. For example, the “Cops in Schools” grant program “awarded about \$823 million for schools to hire school resource officers, funding 7,242 positions in hundreds of communities across the United States from 1999 to 2005” (Wilson, 2020). Since this program, “the presence of police officers in schools nationwide has more than doubled” (Miller and Jean-Jacques, 2020) and a recent report found that “1.7 million students in the US are in schools with police but no counselors” (Whitaker et al., 4, 2019). Instead of being supportive environments for young people to learn and grow, many schools became overly punitive and heavily policed. For many young people, the experience of going to school became much like going through airport security. Federal investment in other security measures included “The Secure Our Schools federal grant program” which “provided about \$123 million from 2002 to 2011 for schools to purchase cameras, metal detectors, and other security equipment” (Wilson, 2020). As a result, in many schools across the country, students are forced to walk through metal detectors, submit to pat-downs, and routine

bag searches sometimes on a daily basis. Not only do these experiences create an environment that is hostile to learning but it also mirrors what life is like in prison.

Teachers and school administrators have also contributed to this environment through their overreliance on police officers to deal with disciplinary concerns. This tendency has led to schools being the primary source of youth referrals to the juvenile justice system (Krezimen 2010, 274). For example, in 2007 a school official called the cops on a Black six-year-old in a Florida classroom for throwing a tantrum – an extremely common behavior for a kindergartener. As a result, the little girl was handcuffed, taken to central booking, and fingerprinted where she was later charged “with battery on a school official, disruption of a school function, and resisting arrest” (Nolan 2011, 19). Even when school staff decides to handle behavioral issues on their own, they often follow subjective, punitive, and racially motivated policies that push children out of educational settings. Due to limited funding and resources, struggling students are not offered access to critical services that address the underlying needs of student “misbehavior”. Instead of being met with support, understanding, and a plan to make things better, students are pushed away and back out into the very environments that often lead them to act out in the first place. This ultimately leads to the child perpetuating the behavior, setting into motion a vicious cycle in which the student has little chance of avoiding suspension, expulsion, or arrest.

This cycle is driven by environmental factors that young people experience in their homes, neighborhoods, and personal lives that schools fail to address. “Between 20 and 50 percent of children in the United States are touched by violence, either as victims or, even more commonly as witnesses” (Stein et al., 1, 2011). The emotional impact of these experiences is profound and can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other mental health struggles that manifest in disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Stein et al., 1, 2011). Instead of being

offered counseling or support services, children are removed from their schools and sent back to environments where their trauma is triggered or where they can be re-exposed. Many young people never receive the services they need to learn adaptive coping mechanisms or ways to control the behaviors that manifest from their trauma. Research shows that students who are exposed to violence and/or suffer from PTSD are “more likely to have behavioral problems, poorer school performance, more days of school absence, and feelings of depressions and anxiety” and although “violence affects all racial, ethnic, and economic groups, its burden falls disproportionately on poor and minority children – they very children whose mental health needs are least likely to be met by the health care system” (Stein et al., 1, 2011).

This lack of support from various systems pushes young people further away from their academics and towards the juvenile justice system because “children shut out from the education system are more likely to engage in conduct detrimental to the safety of their families and communities” (Civil Rights Project, 13, 2000). These conditions have created a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline, a pressing issue that has sparked widespread outrage, research, and activism. The school-to-prison pipeline is a system of laws, policies, and practices that push children out of classrooms and schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice system (Langberg and Nicholson 2013, 204). Other scholars have coined new versions of this phenomenon including the *schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track* (Laura 2014, 13) the *cradle-to-prison pipeline* (Edelman, 2007) and the *school-prison nexus* (Meiners, 2007). Despite some differences in conceptualizations, what is clear amongst all scholars is that there are systems and practices that exist which lead children away from their education and into prisons. These practices include racial bias, zero-tolerance discipline policies, the increased presence of police officers in

schools, school referrals to juvenile detention facilities, and an overall underinvestment in schools and support services for students.

This phenomenon is evidenced through shocking statistics seen in schools across the country. Despite the fact that juvenile crime rates are plummeting and that “the juvenile incarceration rates dropped by 41 percent between 1995 and 2010” – “school discipline policies are moving in the opposite direction (Nelson and Lind, 2015). Since 2000, out-of-school suspensions have increased by 10% (Nelson and Lind, 2015) and an analysis of federal data found that nearly 70,000 students were arrested and over 222,000 students were referred to law enforcement in a single year’s period (2013-2014) (Education Week, 2017). Suspensions, expulsions, arrests, and referrals all limit or remove a young person’s access to educational instruction and support. Removal from educational settings negatively impacts young people’s ability to be successful in their academics and increases their likelihood of dropping out. For instance, a 2012 study found that “being suspended just one time in the ninth grade is related to an increased risk of dropping out” (Pufall Jones, 2018). It also found that “the effects of exclusion can be cumulative, with each additional suspension increasing the risk of dropping out by 10 percent (Jones, 2018). Beyond just the individual impact on each child, this phenomenon hurts society as a whole because educational success and attainment are linked with countless other later life outcomes (Manstead, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, overly harsh discipline policies in schools disproportionately harm more marginalized children including Black and Latino students and students with disabilities (McNeal 2016, 18). Policies that prohibit certain hairstyles and clothing empower educators to apply stereotypes and misinterpret student behavior as defiant or threatening. Studies have found that Black boys are “three times more likely than their White male counterparts be suspended or

expelled in public schools” (Chatmon and Gray 2015, 50). Black girls are five times more likely than their White peers to be arrested on campus (Innis-Thompson 2017, 11). Others have found that “Latino youth are three times more likely to be suspended, expelled, and referred to the criminal justice system” when compared to their White counterparts for committing the same infraction (Castillo 2014, 3). Furthermore, students of color and those with learning disabilities have compounded risk factors since they are also more likely to attend under-resourced schools in low-income neighborhoods (Ghasletwala 2018, 20) further contributing to existing educational inequities and injustices.

Since schools have become feeder systems to juvenile prisons and young people are not receiving the support services they need to be successful both in and out of school, these disparities persist and are just as evident in the juvenile justice system. Young people of color are more likely to be arrested across a range of offenses than their White peers (Rovner 2016, 6). Nationwide, Black children are four times as likely as their White counterparts to be committed to a secure placement facility (Rovner 2016, 1). In some states, this statistic is even higher with the Black/White disparity being ten-to-one meaning that Black “juveniles were more than 10 times as likely as White juveniles to be committed to secure facilities” (Rovner 2016, 1). Relatedly, nationwide Hispanic youth were 61 percent more likely to be in secure juvenile detention placements than their White peers (Rovner 2016, 2). Additionally, youth with disabilities “are more readily referred to the juvenile justice system than non-disabled peers due in part to few community-level service options available to youth with educational needs and delinquent behavior” (Read 2014, 1). These statistics evidence disparities in the juvenile justice system and the ways in which certain children are at increased risk of involvement not by virtue of their behavior but by the color of their skin and/or their disability status.

This tendency to push children out of school and towards incarceration is not only harmful, it is also wasteful. On average, the US spends \$88,000 per year to incarcerate a young person in a state facility in contrast to the \$10,652 it spends per year to educate a child (Bernstein 2015, 6). In some states it is even worse, for example, California spends \$225,000 per year to incarcerate a child “while education spending dipped to less than \$8,000” per year—28 times difference in investment (Bernstein 2015, 6). These comparisons in investment are important because budgets are moral documents that reflect a society’s values. In looking at these numbers, there is a clear disparity in investment with youth incarceration appearing to be worthy of more resources than education. This investment reflects a society that is more focused on punishment after certain behaviors occur than investing in resources that can build protective factors from engaging in those very behaviors. In order to set young people up for success, there needs to be an investment on the front end in their education, not on the back end when it has been deemed that they failed to meet certain expectations.

Despite widespread evidence and research of the wastefulness and harm of youth incarceration, there has not been serious commitment or movement in the form of legislation to end the school-to-prison pipeline or shift away from youth incarceration. Substantial investments in building and expanding large-scale juvenile prisons have actually increased the demand for incarcerated youth and secured new job opportunities for general citizens. Many public officials and legislators would argue that ending youth incarceration is “bad for business”. Others simply lack the imagination to explore alternatives and/or are not aware of other successful models in dealing with harm caused by children. This lack of legislative action highlights the need for real-life, large-scale examples of this shift that brings attention to the issue and exemplifies alternative models and frameworks to youth incarceration.

My research focuses on San Francisco, a city that has committed to interrupting this school-to-prison pipeline and shifting away from youth incarceration through the passing of landmark legislation. Known for its diversity, rich culture, and progressivism, San Francisco has a rich history of grassroots organizing and community activism that have led to significant policy change. Because of this advocacy, in June of 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted almost unanimously to pass legislation that would require the closure of its juvenile hall making it the first major city in the country to do so (Tucker and Palomino 2019). This is a significant step in efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and move away from youth incarceration. The legislation mandated the development of a working group to develop a plan to close the hall and outlined a clear timeline to do so. Perhaps most important to note is that this plan necessitates the reallocation of significant funding from the Juvenile Probation Department to alternative support programs for youth. The vote to close the hall provides a unique opportunity for city partners, educators, police officers, and community-based organizations to get creative and rethink what juvenile justice in the city looks like and means. For these reasons, San Francisco offers an important case study that will provide insight into potential modeling for other cities to follow.

In order to understand how this was possible and to understand its implications for other cities looking to engage in similar work, I asked the following question: What strategies and techniques did San Francisco activists engage in to successfully pass the legislation to close its juvenile hall and what can be learned from the process of its implementation? In this thesis, I argue that the legislation was made possible by a cooperative effort between community-based organizations (CBOs) and city officials who appeared to share a set of values during a unique political window of opportunity. Drawing on Savannah Shange's ideas of a progressive dystopia

and carceral progressivism, I demonstrate, however, that this shared utopian view of the legislation's passing, in practice, has undercut the complexities of the real work needed to close down the hall. Specifically, I show that the process of implementation has revealed a series of tensions between the expressed shared values and their actualization including the tension between the bureaucratic process and the will to make progressive change, the set timeline and the necessary time to address unexpected challenges, opposing views about what an alternative facility should look like, caring for youth and caring for the staff who currently work at the hall, and the tension between a systemic issue and a single piece of legislation. These tensions illustrate that enacting revolutionary change within systems that rely on and prop up carceral institutions threaten to recreate new versions of the same oppressive systems. As such, I propose a series of recommendations meant to mediate these tensions and address ways to challenge the systems that reintroduce oppressive logic and practices. Such a project is important because it asks us to go beyond the appearance of progressive politics and do the work of defining values in practical terms that can bring about transformative justice.

This thesis includes seven relevant sections. These sections provide context to, justify, and demonstrate how I carried out my project. In the first section, I engage in a literature review of three relevant scholarly conversations which ultimately demonstrate the need for my project because there are no examples of cities that have shut down their juvenile prisons and solely relied on alternatives and reinvested in prevention and support. In the second section, I detail my data collection process through the use of semi-structured interviews. In the third section, I frame my methods and justify their use for this project. In the fourth section, I provide some important historical context to my project to frame how San Francisco got to where it is today. In the fifth section, I offer a full analysis of my data and utilize two theoretical frameworks to contextualize

my findings. In the sixth section, I explain the value and importance of my project and the lessons that can be learned from it.

Literature Review

My research question seeks to explore the conditions and practices necessary to pass legislation in San Francisco to close its juvenile hall and what can be learned from its implementation process. This project takes place against the backdrop of existing conversations about the school-to-prison pipeline, the harm of juvenile prisons, and investments in alternative programs and support systems for youth. This section details the findings of these three scholarly conversations which are crucial in understanding the broader context of San Francisco's decision to close its juvenile hall. In the first section, I look at the school-to-prison pipeline through the lens of school-based arrests and juvenile justice referrals demonstrating how schools have become feeder systems to juvenile prisons. Next, I explore the growing body of research on the harm and ineffectiveness of juvenile prisons and arguments that call for an end to youth incarceration. Lastly, I examine what alternatives to youth incarceration look like, a shift from retribution to rehabilitation, and growing efforts to increase support systems for youth.

These conversations demonstrate the connection between schools and juvenile prisons and the harm/trauma that a stay in a juvenile prison can cause a young person, disproportionately affecting Black children. The research also shows that there are successful evidence-based alternative approaches to youth incarceration. At the end of this section, I will position the need for my research in that there are not any examples of cities, counties, or states that have actually moved away from youth incarceration and solely relied on these alternative approaches. This

highlights the importance of understanding how a city can make this type of shift and what types of conditions and/or strategies are necessary in order to be effective in redefining what juvenile justice looks like on a larger scale.

School-Based Arrests and Referrals

As previously defined, the school-to-prison pipeline is a system of laws and practices that push children out of school and into the juvenile justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline is a complex phenomenon with various factors that drive its existence including inadequate resources in schools, racist policies, increased police presence in schools, and draconian disciplinary practices. At the core of this phenomenon is the way in which schools have increasingly become places where students are arrested or sent to court and ultimately fed into the juvenile justice system. These outcomes are often the result of “a series of interactions beginning with the breaking of a school rule” (Nolan 2011, 73). This includes more serious offenses like wielding a weapon or distributing drugs but it also encompasses more subjective and less threatening scenarios including wearing a certain hairstyle, disagreeing with a teacher, or singing in the hallway.

Incidents like these are not unique and researchers have identified a trend of increased disciplinary and security measures in American schools (Roberts et. al. 2010, 77), increased reliance on exclusionary sanctions (Feld 2017, 174), and an increased number of student referrals to the juvenile court system (Krezimen 2010, 290). Scholars often refer to this trend as the “criminalization” of classrooms, children, and school discipline (New York Civil Liberties Union 2007, 27). This is a powerful term as it signifies a shift in the treatment of young people, a group that has historically been seen as more deserving of empathy and understanding as they

develop. This view of children is perpetuated by and entrenched into systems that are meant to support them and help them grow, like schools. Beyond a greater reliance on draconian discipline practices from school staff like teachers and counselors, this criminalization of children is also largely driven by the presence of police officers on campus. Scholars argue that there has been an increased reliance on police officers in schools, also known as School Resource Officers (SROs), and that these officers patrol the hallways with little training or expertise in working with youth (Ghasletwala 2018, 26). “Comparisons of schools with and without SROs do not report that they increase positive perceptions or reduce offending, but SROs increase the numbers of students arrested and referred to criminal courts” (Feld 2017, 180). In this way, “the criminalization of school children” begins (Ghasletwala 2018, 26).

Research also shows that this trend disproportionately affects historically underserved youth and most significantly Black children. It is well recognized that Black children are overrepresented in school discipline and juvenile justice statistics (Wolf 2013, 77). “Federal data covering over 32 million students at nearly 96,000 schools” showed that Black children were expelled, experienced school-based arrests, and received referrals to law enforcement at higher rates than their White peers (Riddle and Sinclair 2019, 8256). Racial biases, social norms, and structural factors all influence teachers, school administrators, and SRO's decisions when it comes to perceptions of Black student “transgressions” and ultimately determining which behaviors are worthy of discipline (Riddle and Sinclair 2019, 8255). These practices in schools have contributed to the overrepresentation of Black children in the juvenile justice system. Although Black children only make up for 16% of all youth under the age of 18 in the US, they account for “28% of juvenile arrests, 34% of all cases disposed by juvenile court, and 41% of youth in public a private residential custody facility” (Morris 2014, 78).

This research demonstrates how American schools have increasingly become places that push young people into the juvenile justice system. It provides important context as to how our educational systems and juvenile justice systems work together and as they exist now, are inextricably linked. This understanding of their connection is crucial to inform discussions of the reimagining of juvenile justice and justifying the fact that schools are also a critical part of this discussion when it comes to reform efforts and where alternative programs and increased support systems for youth can be implemented.

Juvenile Prisons

The concept of juvenile prisons was developed with good intentions when a group of Progressive-era reformers came together in the early 1800s to “rescue children from the degradations of the adult prison” (Bernstein 2015, 38). They were imagined as spaces that would provide beneficial services to youth that would support their futures, including education and employment. The nation’s first known juvenile prison opened its doors in New York in 1825 (Bernstein 2015, 39). This marked a major shift in American society from family discipline to “institutional discipline administered by city, county, or state governments” (Bernstein 2015, 39). Despite their good intentions, in this section, I trace the pervasive history of abuse, harm, and ineffectiveness of juvenile prisons to contextualize the importance of my project and the need for other cities to consider engaging in work to dismantle these harmful institutions.

There is a growing body of evidence that juvenile prisons are harmful to children and do little to actually rehabilitate them or deter them from engaging in crime. Scholars argue that since their inception, juvenile prisons have been “race-and-class-driven enterprises” that lacked regard for the actual wellbeing of the children in their care (Bernstein 2015, 39). From the very first

facility and those that followed, there were accounts of abuse, violence, and the utilization of corporal punishment. Throughout the past 50 years, systemic violence and abuse have been legally documented in juvenile prisons with a combined 57 lawsuits in 33 states (Mendel 2011, 5). In reality, this number is likely much higher as it only includes cases that have been formally documented, and in systems of power like prisons, there is vast underreporting and significant efforts to cover up or hide allegations of abuse. Findings have revealed that abuse is pervasive, “the majority of youth directly experience abuse, witness abuse of others, and vicariously experience abuse by hearing about it happen to others (Dierkhising, Lane and Natsuaki 2014, 186). This abuse takes many forms including physical abuse, psychological abuse, denial of food, excessive stays in solitary confinement, and sexual abuse.

Understanding the pervasiveness of abuse and its effects is critical to understanding arguments for the closing of juvenile prisons. A study released by the Department of Justice’s Review Panel found that of the youth held in state facilities or large non-state facilities between 2008 and 2009, 12% had experienced sexual violence during their stay (Report on Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Correctional Facilities 2010, 2). A survey conducted by the Associated Press found that in 2008 “13,000 claims of abuse had been reported from 2004 to 2007 in state-run juvenile facilities nationwide” (Mendel 2011, 6). Research shows that exposure to abuse during incarceration is correlated with later social-emotional problems including posttraumatic stress reactions, depression, and a re-engagement in criminal activities (Dierkhising, Lane and Natsuaki 2014, 186).

Research shows that these negative later life outcomes are not just associated with those who have been abused but all juvenile inmates. Instead of rehabilitating youth and addressing their needs – “recidivism rates are almost uniformly high” and incarceration depresses youths’

future opportunities for success in education, employment (Mendel 2019, 7), and a range of other life outcomes – all of which are correlated with increased risk of engagement in adult crime. In New York, 90% of boys who spend time inside a juvenile prison end up entering the adult criminal justice system (Cox 2018, 5). Researchers argue that “the juvenile justice system actually harms individuals more than it helps them” and that juvenile offenders face both material and structural obstacles once released that prevent them from stopping from offending (Cox 2018, 5). Multiple studies have found that incarceration not only fails to improve public safety but it actually does the exact opposite leading low-level criminals deeper into criminality (Bernstein 2015, 7). Findings like these demonstrate the ineffectiveness of juvenile prisons to rehabilitate those in their care and deter them from reoffending and how in many ways, juvenile prisons are actually making our society less safe.

These findings raise questions about whether these institutions are worth continued investment if they are not serving the purpose of public safety and rehabilitation. Investment from federal, state, and local governments into juvenile incarceration is significant. In most states, the bulk of taxpayer dollars going to juvenile justice budgets is devoted to incarceration (Mendel 2011, 19). As previously mentioned, on average, the US spends \$88,000 per year to incarcerate a young person with some states reaching a high of \$225,000 (Bernstein 2015, 6). Current spending on youth incarceration per-pupil far exceeds spending in other areas including education and youth support programs like mentorship and career readiness (Mendel 2011, 19). Despite the mounting body of evidence for the harm and ineffectiveness of youth incarceration, most states across the country continue to rely on these facilities and invest significant money and resources into running and maintaining them.

This significant level of investment paired with their poor outcomes raises considerations of the possibility for reinvestment in alternative approaches and the positive impact this could have on children, community, and public safety. Researchers and advocates like Bernstein (2015), Mendel (2019), and Cox (2018) argue that prison-like correctional facilities for youth are harmful, ineffective, and wasteful. All of these authors also advocate for a shift to preventative efforts, community-based supports, and alternatives that are grounded in evidence-based practices. For example, Mendel (2019) argues that states must offer a “balanced mix of treatment and supervision programs” as well as “calibrate their systems to ensure that each individual youth is directed to the treatments, sanctions, and service best suited to his or her unique needs and circumstances” (7). These authors challenge mainstream thinking and efforts by arguing that incremental change and reform are inadequate and that putting an end to youth incarceration is the necessary next step for society.

All of these authors provide important perspective and insight into the need for a complete transformation of how we respond to youth behavior that is outside of the law. Their work is critical in exposing the harm of youth incarceration and provides an important framework for transformational thinking when it comes to redefining what juvenile justice can mean and look like. They offer important evidence and arguments for the atrocities that occur in juvenile prisons and both the cost savings and societal benefits to ending youth incarceration.

Alternatives to Youth Incarceration

Due to the growing body of literature on the school-to-prison pipeline and the pervasive harm and abuse that occurs in juvenile prisons, there have been increased efforts to advocate for alternative approaches. Activists are taking a multipronged approach to end youth incarceration

and dismantle the role schools are playing as a pipeline to prison. The following section outlines successful support programs for young people in schools, alternative frameworks for dealing with harm, programs led by community-based organizations, and alternative care and supervision settings to prisons.

First and foremost, activists claim that there must be a national shift from investment in incarceration to investment in prevention. “The most successful programs are those that prevent youth from engaging in delinquent behaviors in the first place” (Greenwood 2008, 185). This includes community-based support programs that target pregnant teens and their infants, preschool education for historically underserved children, and focused supports for entire families including home visits and case management (Greenwood 2008, 185). School-based interventions have also proven to be effective in preventing drug use, delinquency, anti-social behavior, and early school drop-out (Greenwood 2008, 185). This includes classroom-based programs, curriculum that engages students, teachers, and families, and increased support staff to deliver a variety of services including mental health and special needs supports (Greenwood 2008, 197). These programs have proven to be cost-effective “returning more than five times their cost in future taxpayer savings” and have overwhelming public support (Greenwood 2008, 204). Investment in prevention, as opposed to incarceration, is critical to making communities safer, ensuring better outcomes for youth, and saving taxpayer dollars.

An increasingly popular approach that aims to prevent and respond to harm has been the utilization of restorative justice, a practice that extends back to indigenous communities centuries ago. Restorative justice, also known as RJ, “encompasses a variety of programs and practices” but “at its core is a set of principles, a philosophy, an alternate set of guiding questions” that “provides an alternate framework for thinking about wrongdoing” (Zehr 2015, 2). As a

framework, RJ views crime as a violation of people and relationships and in turn tries to address these violations by creating an obligation to make things right (Wilson, Olaghere and Kimbrell 2015, 3) This practice aims to create a paradigm shift from retribution to restoration which ultimately reframes how individuals and institutions view conflict and harm (Morrison 2015, 446). Fundamental to its practice “is some form of dialog or interaction between the offender and the victim or a victim surrogate, with some programs extending participation to family and community members (Wilson, Olaghere and Kimbrell 2015, 3).

RJ manifests itself in a variety of different approaches today including Victim Offender Mediation, Family Group Conferencing, Community Reparative Boards, and Circles (Wadhwa 2016, 12). These practices take place in a variety of different settings including schools, courtrooms, prisons, etc., and ultimately focus on healing as opposed to punishment. Research has shown promising results for RJ including a “reduction in future delinquent behavior relative to more traditional juvenile court proceedings”, participating youth have “less supportive attitudes toward delinquency” and victims report “improved perceptions of fairness” and “are more likely to feel that the outcome was just” (Wilson, Olaghere and Kimbrell 2015, 3). In place of harsh discipline policies, police intervention, and arrests - RJ can play a crucial role in changing the culture of schools and juvenile courts ultimately reducing the demand for juvenile prisons.

Some forms of RJ and other youth support programs incorporate efforts to help youth understand why adults are “trying to rely less on punitive punishments” followed up by discussions of the disproportionate impact by race in the school-to-prison pipeline and the juvenile justice system (Wadhwa 2016, 50). Efforts to raise the political and social consciousness of young people have been recommended by many scholars, especially when working with youth

of color. Scholars working within the context of schools have conceptualized these efforts as “politicized caring” where educators acknowledge the ways that schools reproduce inequalities and stereotypes (Nasir, Givens and Chatmon 2019, 61). These efforts are grounded in the notion that being blind to the racialized stereotypes “and the distinct cultural and social values in schools serves to continue the anti-Black status quo” (Nasir, Givens and Chatmon 2019, 61). Through these acknowledgements, historically oppressive spaces can be transformed into places where youth of color feel empowered and supported increasing the likelihood of their success in those spaces. This framework was developed from an initiative in Oakland Unified School District, that highlights the importance of adult role models and mentors that look like the young people they serve beyond just their teachers. It also demonstrates the need for more approaches that are grounded in and tailored by the extended community as a way to end intergenerational cycles of trauma and dismantle systems of oppression like juvenile prisons.

Scholars analyzing the role of community-based organizations in youth development argue that “organizations in urban communities can provide youth with opportunities to develop ‘critical civic praxis’ through engagement with ideas, social networks, and experiences that build individual and collective capacity to struggle for social justice” and dismantle systems of oppressions (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007, 693). These efforts work to counter-narratives that “focus on problem adolescent behavior” and “explain youth crime, delinquency, and violence as individual pathological behaviors” (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007, 693). This view of youth acknowledges structural constraints and influences but also highlights their sense of agency to become active participants in positive change (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007, 693). This is critical in helping to motivate and activate young people, many of whom have grown up observing how broken systems fail them and their families on a daily basis which can lead to a

lack of belief in their future potential and opportunities. These types of efforts and acknowledgements are often the spark of energy that drives young people to push for positive change in their communities and engage in advocacy efforts to end systems of oppression.

In addition to the need to address racist systems of oppression in schools and juvenile justice, there is also a need to ensure that there are processes and support systems in place for youth that engage in serious crime. Since research shows that institutions like juvenile prisons, especially large-scale facilities, do not actually rehabilitate youth or prevent crime, a shift away from these settings to alternatives that produce positive outcomes is key. Many scholars have advocated for smaller community-based supervision facilities with lower bed counts than typical juvenile prisons. One example of this is intensive supervision programs (ISP), “a highly structured, continuously monitored, individualized plan that consists of five phases with decreasing levels of restrictiveness” (Kirsberg et. al. 1994, iii). These phases include short-term placement in a community-based facility or designated ISP location, day-time treatment (youth are allowed to sleep at their homes), reintegration with consistent outreach and tracking, routine supervision, and discharge/follow-up (Kirsberg et. al. 1994, 24-30). Central to this model are “case planning and management, program rewards and sanctions, and program services” – a more comprehensive approach to understanding and supporting each youths’ individual needs and situations (Kirsberg et. al. 1994, 31).

Another study of an alternative care setting for foster youth compared outcomes for male adolescents who had a history of serious criminal offenses placed in traditional group care (GC) setting in comparison to those placed in a multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC) (Chamberlain and Reid 1998, 624). GC settings provide general care to “groups of dependent and/or emotionally disturbed youth” but do not provide any specialized programs or services

(Lee and Thompson 2008, 2). MFTC is a behavioral treatment that is delivered in a small care setting as an alternative to incarceration. The study found MTFC to have more favorable outcomes in which participants had significantly fewer criminal referrals, “they committed fewer delinquent acts and fewer violent or serious crimes,” and were more likely to be able to return home to their families after completing the program (Chamberlain and Reid 1998, 630).

There is substantial evidence for the effectiveness and cost-saving nature of alternatives to youth incarceration. Scholars from many disciplines have outlined a variety of different strategies, programs, and approaches to better serve youth in both a preventative way and efforts that actually rehabilitate and repair when harm is done. A national shift is long overdue to “an approach grounded in evidence that promises to be far more humane, cost-effective, and protective of public safety than our timeworn and counterproductive reliance on juvenile incarceration (Mendel 2019, 7). This section has outlined a small subset of the significant evidence that exists for effective alternative investments to youth incarceration, yet there have not been substantial efforts from any level of governance to reinvest. It points to the fact that our government is choosing to rely on harmful and ineffective methods that are counter to the dominant scholarly conversation on how to prevent and respond to youth crime in a way that actually benefits our society and supports young people in this country.

Conclusion

Despite the growing body of literature on the school-to-prison pipeline, the abuse and ineffectiveness of juvenile prisons, and the breadth of successful alternatives, cities across the country are failing to act to create better outcomes for youth. These three scholarly conversations demonstrate the fact that there is ample evidence on how backward current systems are in

dealing with youth misbehavior and crime and that there are substantial alternative practices that can be implemented. Overwhelmingly the research says that our current practices do not work and that there are other options, the problem in the current scholarship is that there are not a whole lot of examples of how these efforts have been put into practice. More specifically, there is not a lot of evidence that demonstrated how cities can change their strategies and intervene in an established system that affects all working parts of the city. In the existing scholarship, there are not any examples of cities, counties, or states that have shifted away from youth incarceration and implemented alternative systems in a scalable and sustainable way.

In many ways, the scholarship remains at a level of theory and my project is dedicated to understanding what this shift looks like in real-life practice and how a city was able to move from theory to practice. Since San Francisco is the first city in the country to vote to close its juvenile prison and reinvest in community-based alternatives it is critically important to understand how this decision came to be. I studied the activism and advocacy that took place in the city that led to this decision and sought to understand how the city will transition its investment from incarceration to education and alternative supports and what decision-making processes were put in place to do so. In order to push for efforts like these on a national scale, San Francisco can provide important insight, lessons, and best practices for youth advocates, lawmakers, city officials, community-based organizations, and beyond.

Methods

In order to understand this transition from theory to real-life practice, it was necessary for me to research this topic by speaking with people who had been involved in the process. Given

the fact that during this period, San Francisco was still in the process of implementing the legislation and was making decisions in real-time, there were a lot of potential lessons and insights that had not yet been explored or published. Reviewing news articles and looking through government documents would not have been sufficient in helping me collect the insight I was interested in understanding. In order to carry out this project, it was critical that I engaged with people who were on the ground doing the work to advocate for the closure of the hall through the passing of the legislation and those who were involved in the working groups and decision-making processes of its implementation.

To collect this type of information, I engaged in a data collection method known as the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview “incorporates both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs” in the relevant discipline (Galletta and Cross 2013, p. 15). These types of interviews are known for their variation in prompts and questions that elicit rich detail and data grounded in the interviewee's lived experiences. They are also interactive which creates space for complexity and reciprocity between the researcher and interviewee (Galletta and Cross 2013, p. 99). This methodology was the best approach to answering my research question because it enabled me to obtain first-hand accounts and experiences that were more nuanced and detailed than any statistic, news article, or single piece of legislation could tell me. This approach was also critical in that it allowed me to gain insight into more sensitive information that hadn't been widely shared or publicized anywhere.

In order to ensure I was speaking with the right individuals, I developed inclusion criteria for my interviews. Participants were selected based on their expertise and involvement in efforts related to juvenile justice in San Francisco. Interview participants had to fit into at least one of

the following categories: activists who engaged in efforts to close the hall, non-profit leaders who provide services to juvenile justice-involved youth, policymakers and city officials who were involved in passing the vote, legislative aides and assistants who were a part of developing the legislation, individuals who have been a part of the working groups, staff of the Juvenile Probation Department, someone who has been impacted by the system. Participants also had to be at least 18 years of age to participate and were required to sign a consent form in order to participate. The consent form ensured that they had a full understanding of the study, their rights as a participant, their anonymity, and who to reach out to if they had any concerns or questions.

This inclusion criteria helped me to develop a group of interviewees that represented diverse perspectives and ensured that a multitude of experiences, attitudes, and viewpoints were represented in my project. I interviewed ten people between the months of February and April of 2021. Therefore, my data reflects information from that point and before. I was not able to continue my data collection through the entirety of the legislation's enactment. As such, it reflects the thoughts, feelings, and insight of those in the middle of this process – an important point to memorialize and examine in this ground-breaking decision to close the hall.

Due to the sensitivity of the issue and the tensions that were revealed throughout my interview process, I decided to anonymize the direct interview quotes in my data analysis section in order to protect the identities and standing of my participants. Despite this decision for direct quotations, I must highlight the diverse perspectives that were included. Participants included nonprofit representatives, advocates, and juvenile justice service providers, individuals who have been impacted by the system and/or are a part of the current working groups to enact the legislation. A full list of participants can be found in my acknowledgements section. It was critically important to me to include a range of perspectives in this project to capture the different

experiences with this work based on the positions in which people were sitting and their own personal lived experiences with the issue.

Interviews were held on Zoom or over the phone. Interviews that were held over Zoom were recorded and transcribed through the Zoom platform. Interviews that were held over the phone were recorded using a recorder and transcribed by hand on a word document. The interview sessions lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and a half and consisted of about ten questions depending on participant responses and follow-ups. The questions were focused on obtaining information in two primary areas 1) What strategies and techniques did San Francisco activists and city officials engage in to pass the legislation to close the hall? 2) What are the successes and challenges with this process so far both in the working groups and beyond? 3) The interview questions also aimed to gain an understanding of the individual's relationship to the topic, their personal feelings about the closure of the hall, and their opinion on the responsibilities of the juvenile justice system more generally. Interviews were guided by the questions but also conversational and responsive to direction from the participant following the nature of a semi-structured interview. In some cases, each of my questions was asked directly and in others, each question was answered based on the natural flow of the conversation.¹

Overall, the interview process ran smoothly but some minor challenges arose. Due to the virtual nature of these interviews, there were some tech-related issues. There were a few instances where participants had issues entering the Zoom room or had background noises on the phone that were distracting. Another challenge was a lack of response from various individuals I did cold outreach to. I found myself to be far more successful in scheduling interviews with individuals with who I had some kind of connection to or had a shared colleague or friend. The

¹ See appendix A for full list of interview questions

COVID19 pandemic has affected individuals I was interested in interviewing in various ways. Many have been forced to be online for long hours each day and may have Zoom or online meeting fatigue which may have affected my response rate. Others have been providing essential in-person services to young people and their families and have been working extra hours, going above and beyond during this time of heightened need. This also could have affected my response rate due to overall exhaustion and increased reliance on non-profit workers, many have little time to fit in other commitments. Despite these challenges, I was able to include a diverse group of participants that reflected a cross-section of views and experiences related to my topic and there were no challenges that had major implications to the data collection process.

History

In order to frame the context and background of the information that was shared in these interviews, it is critical to understand the history and landscape in which this decision took place at a national, state, and local level and how these conditions supported the passing of the legislation.

The pervasive use of and reliance on juvenile detention in the United States was largely driven by a rise in juvenile crime across the country in the late 20th century. Between 1980 and 1994, the number of juvenile arrests for violent offenses in the United States grew by 64% (Butts and Travis 2002, 2). By the early 1990s, this trend had captured national attention and there was significant fear amongst citizens and policymakers alike. In response to these fears, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, “nearly every state in the country had launched new juvenile justice reform initiatives” (Butts and Travis 2002, 2) reflecting more of a “tough on crime”

approach with young people including increased investment in detention facilities and police officers and harsher punishments for crimes.

Despite California being known for its progressivism, it was not unique from the rest of the country in this trend. During this time the state of California enacted harsher punishments for juveniles and invested significant resources into building new detention facilities to house the “anticipated flow of ever more dangerous delinquents that many feared were still to come” (Tucker and Palomino 2019). Between 1996 and 2007, 41 of California’s 58 counties expanded or built new juvenile halls making space for an additional 2,500 young people to be incarcerated (Tucker and Palomino 2019). Hundreds of millions of state and federal dollars were spent increasing the state’s capacity to detain juveniles they deemed to be delinquent. California, along with the rest of the country, built the infrastructure to imprison more young people than ever before.

Contrary to earlier trends and predictions, the United States saw a steady decline in all crime, for both youth and adults, even as the country took a national shift towards harsher punishments and increased investment in detention facilities (Youth Crime Rates 2018). From the peak offense era in crime of the 1990s to today, “robbery and aggravated assault rates have both dropped by 70%, simple assaults are down by 49%, and murder rates have fallen a staggering 82%” (Youth Crime Rates 2018). Although we saw a decline in all crime, youth crime in particular was dropping at staggering rates; “between 1980 and 2016, the arrest rate dropped 84 percent for juveniles, though it fell only 9 percent for adults in their 50s” (Tucker and Palomino 2019). In the state of California, rates of serious youth crime and incarceration fell even faster. Before the 1990s “California’s youth were considerably more likely to be arrested than youth elsewhere in the country; now the rates are comparable” (Males 2012, 2). There is no

clear consensus around why youth crime rates dropped and have continued to decline over time but many theorists have tried to explain it. A primary argument is that there has been “increased attention given to at-risk or troubled juveniles before they end up arrested for committing a crime” – ultimately that “family and community members have the opportunity to intervene and send the youth to services aimed at preventing system involvement” (MST Services 2018). Some other possible explanations include “a decline of lead poisoning in children” and “pivotal shifts in the street drug trade” (Tucker and Palomino 2019).

San Francisco was not unique from the rest of the country and California. San Francisco had two juvenile detention facilities; its Log Cabin Ranch located in the Santa Cruz Mountains and its Juvenile Hall, also known as the Youth Guidance Center or YGC, located in south San Francisco. The Log Cabin Ranch was built in the 1950s and at its high held as many as 80 youth (Matier and Ross 2018). The Juvenile Hall was one of the many facilities across the state that was rebuilt to increase capacity in 2006 and now holds 150 beds for young people. Population in these two facilities peaked in 1996, with a total of 193 youth held in either of the two facilities (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 1). Since then, the number of youth detained in these two facilities has been steadily declining (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 1). Based on a variety of factors including low population size, costliness, and security concerns, San Francisco’s Log Cabin Ranch closed down in 2018 (Matier and Ross 2018) leaving San Francisco with its single youth detainment site, Juvenile Hall.

In the year 2019, San Francisco detained an average of 37 youth, a decline of 81 percent from its peak in 1996 (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 1) leaving the hall over 70% empty for most of the year. Despite this, San Francisco has maintained high levels of spending on its juvenile hall with an overall budget of \$11.9 million in 2019 (Bishari 2019). With the

juvenile population in the hall continuing to decline and spending remaining relatively flat, the cost of incarcerating just one youth in 2018 was \$266,000 (Tucker and Palomino 2019). For comparison, the state of California “spends roughly \$11,500 a year to educate each K-12 student” (Tucker and Palomino 2019). The outrageous cost to incarcerate one child in San Francisco sparked widespread outrage and fueled existing efforts to invest in alternatives, reimagine juvenile justice, and shift away from youth incarceration.

Beyond just the cost of incarcerating one young person in the hall, another important consideration in conversations to close the hall was looking at the population characteristics of those who were inside. A report that looked at the demographics of youth detained in the hall in November of 2019 found that 72.5 % of youth were Black and just 2.5% were White (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 2). These numbers are striking when compared to the overall population breakdown in San Francisco where White people make up 41.2% of residents and Black people make up just 5.4% (Race and Ethnicity in San Francisco, 2019). These disparities persist when it comes to neighborhood representation in the hall where 30% of youth detained came from the Bayview/Hunters Point, a predominately Black neighborhood (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 2). These alarming statistics bring about questions of racism and discrimination in San Francisco’s juvenile justice system and have driven advocates to directly call out who is being most harmed by the city’s Juvenile Hall.

Compounding the fact that San Francisco was overspending on incarceration and that Black and Brown youth were disproportionately represented in the hall, it also became clear that in many ways, the hall was often being utilized as a holding facility. On a given day in the hall, there are generally “three distinct groups: 1) youth who are detained following their arrest, 2) youth awaiting transfer to an out-of-home placement, and 3) youth detained for violating the

terms of their probation (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 3). Important to note is that the youth in the first group are awaiting processing or adjudication, meaning they have not yet been convicted of any crime. Youth who fall in this group are typically “released within 48 hours” but a small number of them, “usually those with more serious charges, remain for longer periods, including some that are detained for more than a month” (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 3). Perhaps more important to acknowledge is youth in the second group, that is those who are simply awaiting placement in an out-of-home program. This means that the court decided that the young person should not remain in the high-security juvenile hall but depending on “availability of programs and the urgency with which a youth’s probation officer completes the process” the youth may end up serving considerable time (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 3). This group makes up about one-third of the juvenile hall population, even though it was decided that they should not remain there.

Another characteristic that evidences how the hall has been utilized as more of a holding facility as opposed to a long-term international solution is children’s length of stay. In November of 2009, the average length of stay was 66.1 days in custody but in November of 2019, the average fell to 43.7 days (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 4). This data shows that “youth serve shorter time on average, and the proportion serving 30 or more days has decreased” (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 4). Even more important is that the large majority of youth referred to the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department are released quickly sometimes only spending a few hours or days in custody (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 4). The decreasing average of young people’s length of stay in the hall is yet another factor that points to the ways in which the facility has become unnecessary and is not a practical long-term solution to keep children who have been accused of or convicted of a crime.

Understanding these different characteristics of the population in juvenile hall is critical to understanding the need and opportunity for alternatives. First and foremost, racial disparities evidenced in the hall are unacceptable and unjust. These statistics evidence a systemic bias within San Francisco's juvenile justice system that disproportionately harms Black children that must be addressed. Secondly, the fact that many of the youth in the hall are awaiting a hearing or placement in a different facility is extremely problematic since "research shows that any amount of time in detention can be traumatic for youth and have lifelong effects on their well-being" (Macallair, Males, and Washburn 2019, 4). This also connects to youth's length of stay which has been evidenced to be decreasing over the years indicating the hall's role as more of a holding facility as opposed to some kind of long-term intentional solution. These factors are important to understand in what conditions existed in the buildup to the passing of the legislation.

In June of 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to close down its juvenile hall, making it the first city in the nation to do so. The legislation reiterated the findings of the research by outlining the declining numbers of young people in the hall, the abuse and trauma that takes place within the walls of the hall, and the overall ineffectiveness of youth incarceration. It outlined a commitment to avoid institutional placements for young people and to instead invest in alternative support systems. In order to make this shift, the legislation established the development of a working group with representation from a cross-section of expertise who were tasked with developing a closure plan and establishing a reinvestment fund/strategy. The working group began meeting in December of 2019 with a timeline outlined in the legislation for the official closure of the hall to be in December of 2021 giving the working groups two years to execute.

Data Analysis

My history section outlines the ways in which this was a particularly unique moment in San Francisco. The time in which I began my data collection process was also uniquely pivotal. I began my data collection in February of 2021, putting me right in the middle of this process and giving me insight in real-time into how the process was going and what it was like for those involved. I wanted to understand what it took to get the legislation passed and what could be learned from its enactment. In order to do so, I asked the following research question: What strategies and techniques did San Francisco activists engage in to successfully pass the legislation to close its juvenile hall and what can be learned from the process of its implementation?

In this section, I argue that the legislation was made possible by a cooperative effort between community-based organizations (CBOs) and city officials who appeared to share a set of values during a unique political window of opportunity. Drawing on Savannah Shange's ideas of a progressive dystopia and carceral progressivism, I will demonstrate, however, that this shared utopian view of the legislation's passing, in practice, has undercut the complexities of the real work needed to close down the hall. Specifically, I show that the process of implementation has revealed a series of tensions between the expressed shared values and their actualization including the tension between the bureaucratic process and the will to make progressive change, the set timeline and the necessary time to address unexpected challenges, opposing views about what an alternative facility should look like, caring for youth and caring for the staff who currently work at the hall, and the tension between systemic issues and a single piece of legislation. These tensions illustrate that enacting revolutionary change within systems that rely

on and prop up carceral institutions threaten to recreate new versions of the same oppressive systems. As such, I propose a series of policy changes meant to mediate these tensions and address ways to challenge the systems that reintroduce oppressive logic and practices. Such a project is important because it asks us to go beyond the appearance of progressive politics and do the work of defining values in practical terms that can bring about transformative justice.

When the Stars Align

The passing of the legislation was made possible through advocacy work related to youth issues and youth incarceration that has taken place over the multiple decades in San Francisco. Many of the individuals interviewed have been working with system-involved youth and advocating for alternatives to incarceration for over 20 years. One participant offered a historical account of the advocacy work in San Francisco leading up to this moment that dated back to the 1960s with the “establishment of Citizens for Juvenile Justice by Jane Jacobs”. He outlined a continuum of efforts from the 1970s through the 1990s with “the creation of a program called Real Alternatives by Jim Queen, an activist in the Mission District”, a grant “that led to the creation of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth” and the leadership and advocacy work of Margaret Brodtkin. Other participants shared stories about how “organizations have not only been doing this work for decades” but that the people in those organizations “have been in their positions for decades” which provides activists with a kind of historical and institutional knowledge that supports the work. These testimonies made clear that efforts to redefine juvenile justice in San Francisco were not new. Instead, they were part of the momentum that has been

built up and developed by activists and community-based organizations in San Francisco for over fifty years.

The realization of these efforts was made possible due to a unique political window that occurred in San Francisco in 2019 when the city had a lot of newly elected progressive Democrats on the Board of Supervisors. Three of these supervisors consistently came up in my interview process. It was “the perfect political storm of Matt Haney, Hilary Ronen, and Shamann Walton – all extremely progressive folks who are willing to go against the grain”. One participant captured the importance of this political trifecta and what makes them so unique as follows:

What's critical is that you had somebody on the board, as soon as he got elected, who made this issue a central part of their platform. That was Shamann Walton and he deserves enormous credit. And Hillary Ronan was the other one, the other supervisor who supported him. And then Matt Haney who also did. Those are the big three but Shamann really took the leadership role on it and it was perfect. I mean he's an African American guy who was in the system as a young kid, you know, he had experienced that himself and knew the reality of it and was able to call the system on its bullshit. And then you had Hillary Ronen, who was an immigrant rights and human rights advocate in her prior career. Then Matt Haney, who's the son of Craig Haney who was part of the Stanford prison study and a noted expert on what goes on inside prisons. (Interviewee D)

What is so important about this quote is that it demonstrates that not only were these Supervisors willing to go against the grain, but that they also had a sense of shared values, lived experiences, and backgrounds that fortified their commitment to the cause and aligned them with the activist efforts that had been taking place for so long before them.

These expressed shared values between activists and city officials were a critical part of developing and passing the legislation. The two most foundational acknowledgements made by interviewees were the need to “do better” for young people and that in order to do that the city needed to “close the hall” (Interviewee I). More generally, there was shared recognition that

“juvenile justice reform is about making sure that all young people are thriving in the city”, that “we don’t wait till kids get in trouble to try to help them”, a need to invest in “more prevention and upstream work instead of waiting and trying to do intervention” and a reimagining “of how we define what a criminal act is” and “what restorative justice really looks like” (Interviewee I). Perhaps most importantly, there was agreement that incarcerating children “does more harm than good” (Interviewee H) that the system “targets” historically marginalized groups of children (Interviewee F) and that “there’s all this money being wasted” (Interviewee F) on a largely empty facility. These shared values and understandings between city leadership and the activist community were a foundational part of what made space for the development of this legislation.

Another important factor that made way for this unique political window of opportunity was the role of the media. In March of 2019 the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a widely respected and highly consumed news source in the Bay Area, released an investigative series that helped to validate, summarize, and confirm these shared values to the public. The report outlined the massive spending on juvenile prisons in California, and specifically in the city of San Francisco where the city “[was] spending upwards of \$300,000 per child per year” (Tucke and Palomino 2019). The article elevated important arguments that aligned with what activists had been saying for years and what the newly elected city officials agreed with. One participant summarized these arguments into three buckets and captured the overall sentiment of the report as follows:

We have the clear argument that it's immoral, it's a waste of money, and it doesn't work. It's like literally those three things - why would you do something that doesn't rehabilitate children at all, it makes it actually more horrible for them, and it worsens their future prospects. Add to that the fact that we're spending upwards of \$300,000 per child per year on this waste of a thing that doesn't work. And it's cruel, and inhumane, and leads to trauma. (Interviewee C)

Because this information came from “the most mainstream, often leaning conservative paper in San Francisco” made activists realize that there was “the political will to do something”

(Interviewee C). The SF Chronicle's reach and respect was a powerful validating force that informed a lot of public opinion on this issue and made it possible for city officials to garner support from the general public.

The support from the public created the conditions in which city officials engaged with CBO members with a mutual sense of respect and partnership. The commitment from city leadership to partner with the community was critical. It is an important distinguishing factor about what made this moment particularly special in that it allowed for the voices of activists who had been speaking out for years to finally be heard and for their proposals to be seriously considered at a citywide level. My interviews demonstrated that CBOs and community members "were a part of the writing of the legislation and the vetting of the legislation" (Interviewee H). This is not to say that there were no changes, edits, and compromises made after the community input process – but there was more input than a typical legislative writing process would reflect. This is important because it led to greater buy-in from community and CBO representatives who were a part of this writing process and committed to seeing the legislation through.

This long-standing history of activism, the appearance of a shared set of values, the media's validation, and the newly elected progressive board created a unique window of opportunity for this collaborative ground-breaking legislation to pass. It was a moment in which "all of the stars aligned" (Interviewee F). Despite this, the process of implementing this legislation revealed a series of complexities and nuances that turned these "shared values" on their head. Through my interviews, it became clear that these shared values were only expressed at a very surface level and there were very different interpretations of what it meant to actually "close the hall". In many ways, the celebration of this "progressive win" covers over and impedes the more difficult work of actually ending youth incarceration.

Progressive Dystopia

What unites all of my interview participants, was a shared acknowledgement of the unique progressivism that exists in the city. When talking about San Francisco, participants referred to it as “a unicorn blue utopia” (Interviewee F) and an “uber progressive” (Interviewee B) place - alluding to sentiments of fantasy or an over-romanticized view of San Francisco politics. These shared values and progressive sentiments are part of what made the legislation passing possible but its implementation has revealed that it is “easy to hide behind that and sort of speak the rhetoric and then not actually do the work right” (Interviewee H). There was even mention of “magic wands” and “genies” when it came to actualizing some of what the legislation committed to doing (Interviewee E). This fantastical view of the work alludes to a sense of the impossibility of the task at hand and demonstrates the disconnect of the progressive rhetoric that championed the legislation and the actualization of “closing the hall”.

In this section, I turn to the work of Savannah Shange in “Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco” (2019) to theorize the impact of the fantastical sense surrounding the legislative process. Shange has coined two helpful terms that represent the ways in which progressive “wins” can perpetuate the carceral state, “even as they seek to eliminate it” (14). Shange describes San Francisco as a *progressive dystopia*, a “perpetually colonial place that reveals both the possibilities and limits of the late liberal imaginary” (11) – a place where despite the fact that equality and justice are shouted from the rooftops, the city still struggles to achieve those ideals. She uses the word progressive to “reference both the redistributive ideal and contests over how to realize it” highlighting the diverse groups who identify with this term but the sometimes “conflicting political imaginaries” (11). In a place like San Francisco, this is evidenced in the shared identity of progressivism that

much of the city takes on but the differences in the ways these values translate into policy and action. Just because community members of the Board of Supervisor members appear to agree on a shared value does not mean they imagine the solution to be the same.

Shange operates from the framework of a dystopia “to highlight the social conditions produced when the progressive promise is broken” (12). This term highlights the fact that although San Francisco is idolized as a “unicorn blue utopia” (Interviewee A) that is often at the forefront of progressive social change, it is still plagued with egregious inequality including its juvenile justice system. The unfortunate reality is that San Francisco is often an example of making a terrible thing a little bit better. San Francisco has not been successful in creating a progressive *utopia* but rather finds ways to mitigate the *dystopia* in which it exists. That *dystopia* is both the realities that exist within the city of San Francisco and the much larger societal issues that persist across the United States. According to Shange, these well-intentioned efforts are juxtaposed with the reality of progressive folks not actually being able to solve the larger problems which means that real people continue to suffer and experience injustice every single day.

Shange also offers the concept of *carceral progressivism* “whereby the acknowledgement of systemic injustice serves as an alibi for the retrenchment of that very system” (14). More specifically how sometimes those who seek to address “inequities in communities of color” can end up creating something that looks different but perpetuates what existed before it (14). As a framework this concept “brings our attention to the continuities between racism and antiracism, allowing us to disentangle intention from impact, and disrupt right/left dichotomies” (15). Shange suggests that even though something may appear to have an “anti-racist” and “progressive” stamp its impact can have the opposite effect. This concept encourages a

broadening of perspective with the goal of moving away from pointing fingers at who is right and who is wrong or who is on what side of the political spectrum. Instead, Shange alludes to a more critical and nuanced approach that is focused on the impact and real-life implications of policy change.

In the case of my thesis, these two concepts provide a framework for understanding the difficulty of enacting this legislation in San Francisco. The *progressive dystopia* contextualizes the backdrop of what is at stake, the limits of the expressed shared values, and the tensions of their actualization. Despite the sense of shared progressivism between those involved in this process, it is clear that there are vastly different interpretations and translations of the said goal of “closing the hall”. These differences reveal the tensions between those who saw this legislation as a way for reform and those who saw it as a means to abolition. Most importantly, the concept of *carceral progressivism* provides an important lens to understand the impact of the mediation of these differences. Specifically, it serves as a warning for San Francisco not to recreate another version of the same system that is harming children and communities of color.

The Real World

Although I expected my interviews to reveal some challenges, I did not expect them at the level in which they unraveled. In many of my interviews, there was a clear sense of frustration, irritability, and exhaustion from the process so far. Many participants spent a large portion of the interview explaining the complexities of the legislation’s implementation, the various delays to the process, and the disagreements that have arisen along the way. These tensions were juxtaposed with the early part of the interview that was focused on the momentum and excitement of passing the legislation. This shift in tone demonstrated the need to focus on

what happened after the legislation was passed in order to better understand what the actualization of the said goals looked like.

An important tension that was revealed early on in my interviewee process was that of the bureaucratic nature of the legislation's implementation and the barriers this presented to getting the work done. This was most notably demonstrated by the Brown Act, also known as the Sunshine Law, which delayed the group's start early on and then continued to get in the way of doing things efficiently. This law requires that local governments conduct their work in a way that is open and public. For the working group, this meant making the meetings "accessible to the public and agendas beforehand" and allowing space for public input/comment on all aspects of the agendas (Interviewee A). The working group started their meetings in "December of 2019, held another in January" of 2020, and then realized that they were not in compliance with this law and therefore "didn't get to meet in February" (Interviewee H). While many participants acknowledged and supported the idea of "transparency" and acknowledged the importance of commitment to "integrity" in the process, they also explained how this delayed the working process to getting things done (Interviewee F). This was especially the case for participants who were a part of subcommittees which were made up of smaller groups of people. Due to the Brown Act, they could not do any collaborative work outside of the official meetings which limited how they could make decisions and get things done ultimately "slowing things down" (Interviewee A).

The bureaucratic nature of this process was so frustrating for some, that they took things into their own hands evidencing the real lack of collaboration and efficacy of the working group and its subcommittees. One interviewee explained that a coalition that meets outside of the working group is partnering with "some professors from San Francisco State to write up our own

recommendations – because I don't see how they're headed toward a plan at this point”

(Interviewee F). This quote evidences the ways in which the very intention of the working group and its subcommittees, to get a cross-section of experts to come together and come up with the best recommendations possible, has been undermined. The interviewee further explained:

We were running off and doing our own thing, like we have to. [The city] knows about this plan so when its finalized and were ready to send it, we're just going to send it to everybody involved and say here are our recommendations, this is what we have, because in the end the chips are just going to fall where they fall.
(Interviewee F)

Drawing on Shange's *progressive dystopia*, this quote highlights how efforts to affect positive change are often undercut by the realities of difficult systems and processes that force people to pursue alternative ways of getting the work done and undermine the very collective effort that was previously championed.

Another tension amidst this bureaucratic nature of this work is that although the Brown Act suggests a transparent process, there are still various decisions that are made behind closed doors. These laws can “give the illusion of transparent decision making” and the “illusion of community voice” but everyone knows that there are “still decisions in the in-between, conversations, sidebars, and the moving of things along that are done far less transparently” (Interviewee F). As one interviewee put it, “that is the crap that I hate about politics” (Interviewee F). This tension illuminates one of the difficult realities of bureaucratic processes and that is the fact that oftentimes what the public sees is only a small part of what is happening in reality. Drawing on the concept of a *progressive dystopia*, even though transparency is an important shared value among progressive individuals, its actualization in processes like these is difficult. Whether sidebar work/conversations are intentionally hidden or if they are done out of

a necessity to move things along, the concept of transparency can both hinder progress and slow things down, while also, in many ways, still being illusionary.

Relatedly, a strong point of tension was the politics of the date in which the hall was projected to close and how long the process was actually taking. Many interviewees indicated that from the beginning, the timeline outlined in the legislation “was super ambitious” - that even without the various disruptions including delays to the group’s ability to meet and the COVID19 pandemic, that the timeline was going to difficult to achieve (Interviewee J). Compound this with the various other factors that created delays and people began to develop strong opinions about whether or not sticking to the initial deadline was even possible. One participant went as far as to say “unless someone has a magic wand and a genie, I don’t see it being done by December” (Interviewee E). From the city perspective, there is a clear expectation “about meeting the timeline and keep in line with the proposed legislation” (Interviewee G). Those in the working groups were clearly “told that there is no shifting the timeline” - that “the Board of Supervisors want to close it down by the original date” (Interviewee H). While the commitment to sticking to the deadline is driven by good intentions of wanting the hall to close, there are also clear political motivations to do so. With all of the attention the legislation got, the need to achieve the outlined date appears to be more “symbolic and visual than it is right” (Interviewee H).

The interviewee's statement about what is right points out yet another tension regarding the timeline, and that is the moral question of whether or not its right to proceed with the anticipated closure date if it is motivated most by the optics. One interviewee stated their yearning to “do the best planning and create the best response and new vision” possible “while understanding the kind of political needs of the legislation to do it on a certain timeline” (Interviewee J). But what they weren’t willing to do was “to sacrifice the quality of what we

come up with for our kids for a deadline that we picked when we were writing the legislation and we knew was super ambitious when we picked it” (Interviewee J). This quote highlights the importance of what is at stake and that is the quality of the alternative and the impact that it will have on kids’ lives. These sentiments were echoed in another powerful statement as follows:

I personally think I don't want to fuck up anybody else's life. If we're not ready by December I don't want us to close. I definitely want us to not utilize the facility anymore but I am also not willing to say let's just rid ourselves of the process, clean our hands, we did what we can do, because it's December 31, 2021.
(Interviewee H)

This quote alludes to this kind of *dystopian* backdrop that Shange discusses in the sense that despite the existence of these collective values of wanting to do better, in the meantime children’s lives are being destroyed and if the alternative created isn’t any better, this will continue to be the case. Overall, there was a sense from multiples interviewees that they would rather delay the process a little in an effort to ensure that the alternative is better than what exists now. If the alternative(s)the working group decides on isn’t drastically different from and better than what exists now, San Francisco runs the risk of engaging in *carceral progressivism* and continuing to cause harm to children in new ways. This is evidenced by some of the alternatives that are being considered including “revamping” the existing facility or utilizing Edgewood, a nonprofit building in the city (Interviewee E). Both of these options are still grounded in a facility-based approach where it is easy to see how aspects of the previous institution could persist or reinvent itself in new ways.

Perhaps the most telling example of the disconnect between the expressed shared values and their actualization is demonstrated by the slogan itself of “close the hall” – rhetoric that was shared by activists, city officials, and community members alike. The unity around this slogan very clearly deteriorated in its actualization. Despite the appearance of a united front and an

alignment in these progressive values – “everybody was not on the same page about what it meant to close down the building” (Interviewee J). There were essentially two different understandings: one being that San Francisco would no longer “hold any kids in secure detention” and the other being that San Francisco would be rebuilding a non-institutional facility that “still complies with federal and state laws” regarding securely detaining young people (Interviewee J). The fact that these different interpretations were not widely clarified before the implementation process has led to serious debate about what a viable alternative looks like.

The need for the new facility to be compliant with state and federal guidelines, in many ways, diminishes the “revolutionary” potential of this process. One interviewee expressed that “San Francisco is really struggling because there are people who don’t want a kid to spend a night in a bed and that’s just not realistic” (Interviewee B). This participant raises the question of what is realistic, a view that is positioned next to the utopian vision of the legislation’s passing and those who saw it as a means for ending the institutionalization of young people in San Francisco. According to Shange, “utopia and dystopia in practice tend to test the boundaries of reality: the former approaches an ideal but rarely reaches it – stopped by the real world – and the latter makes visible various breaking points and vulnerability” (12). In many ways, this quote captures what is happening in San Francisco now. On the face of it, the legislation appeared to be going against the grain and “testing the boundaries of reality”. Yet, in its implementation the real world has gotten in the way and its “various breaking points and vulnerability” have been revealed.

The implementation process has revealed the unfortunate reality of trying to change a smaller part of a much larger carceral system – creating a *utopian* vision in the context of a larger *dystopia* and putting San Francisco at risk of engaging in *carceral progressivism*. If the city

cannot balance these two realities in a way that actually transforms the juvenile justice system, then the same injustices young people face every day will persist. The complexities of working towards this type of revolutionary change are revealed through the realities of if the city does not build something compliant with state and federal guidelines:

Our juvenile presiding judge is going to have to approve of whatever is created and if we don't have an actual secure youth detention center in San Francisco, our judges can send kids to neighboring county's juvenile halls and that would be the worst - for us to create something we think is lovely here, and then it doesn't get used and that's their authority under the law. It needs to be something that the court feels comfortable with and that means abiding by state laws. (Interviewee J)

This quote reveals the constraints that are placed on San Francisco activists and policymakers in engaging in transformative change. If compliance is a central part of this conversation, and it needs to be because we don't want kids to be sent away, then the realities of what this "reimagined" system can look like are truly limited. The concept of *carceral progressivism* draws attention to the fact that the larger system of juvenile prisons was built upon colonialism, oppression, racism, and classism. If this is the case then we must ask, how can that same system bring about something that is truly different? No matter how well-intentioned, creative, and revolutionary the people of San Francisco are - the very system in which the city exists almost forces them to create a "retrenchment of that very system" (Shange, 14, 2019).

As a framework, *carceral progressivism* also helps us to move beyond blame, ideologies, and right/left dichotomies and focus more on the nuance and complexities of engaging in antiracist work. The need for this more nuanced approach is evidenced by tensions around what happens to the staff that currently work at San Francisco's juvenile hall. "When we're talking about the staff at juvenile hall and the probation officers there, we're talking about Black and Brown folks" (Interviewee H). Additionally, for a lot of people of color in San Francisco, getting a job with the city is a critical pathway to economic and social mobility (Interviewee H). This

complexity has revealed a clear tension between stakeholders in what this legislation should be doing for people of color working at the hall.

I think there's been some confusion, that like as long as we keep Black and Brown folks in these positions, we are supporting Black and Brown communities. But they're not the same thing right, because what we're doing with these jobs is upholding a system of people that uphold oppression. (Interviewee H)

This quote contrasted with the previous acknowledgement of how these jobs support the livelihoods of Black and Brown communities is clearly complex. It reveals the fact that while the hall may be providing jobs to communities of color, they are jobs in the very system that is disproportionately targeting and harming that very community.

The complexities of the tension around staffing were further revealed in the ways in which interviewees raised moral questions about the staff and those of which were the “good ones” vs. the “bad ones”. While many people expressed the fact that they thought some staff at the hall got into the work for the “right reasons”, the various allegations and documentation of abuse cannot go unaddressed or ignored. The reality is that there have also been people who have worked in the hall that are not there with the best interest of children in mind. Relatedly, some participants expressed sentiments that even the good ones are indoctrinated into a system that aims to enforce order with children instead of rehabilitating them. These sentiments were particularly strong with one participant who believes that juvenile probation staff have no place in doing rehabilitative or supportive work with system-involved youth moving forward:

I actually see [their role] as obsolete because, just think about this right - if we're saying that young people's brains do not fully develop until they're 25 and that our system has, since the beginning of time, been set up to acknowledge the difference between adults and youth, the adult system is meant to punish somebody who should have knew better but the youth system is meant to actually rehabilitate a young person so that once they're of age they don't continue to go down that path. Then isn't it common sense to make sure that the people who are supporting them aren't punishing them? But that they're actually trying to rehabilitate them? Probation does not do that, its role does not do that, because the system that they exist in does not do that. (Interviewee H).

This interviewee highlights how the very system of probation is grounded in punishment which is counter to the goals that this legislation is trying to achieve. They suggest that the staff are a function of that system and therefore have no role in rehabilitation work. This position was juxtaposed with another interviewees viewpoint as follows:

You know I keep saying to folks, we're in the space of talking about restorative justice and second chances. Yet everybody's like, the probation officers have to go because they're basically bad or they don't agree with them or they're trying to define who they are. So, we're talking about restorative justice for everybody, except for probation officers, so that is a challenge for me, that just doesn't make sense. (Interviewee I)

This participant is demonstrating how the framework of this legislation, which is rehabilitation, is not being extended to the staff that works there. The tensions between these viewpoints draw attention to “the continuities between racism and antiracism” and how the system itself is set up in a way to make revolutionary change extremely difficult. In this case, is it for the young people at the hall or is it for the staff, and in what ways is their liberation connected? This question paints a much more complex picture disrupting the monolithic perspective of progressives in the city forcing them to go deeper and work through the real impacts of the implementation of this legislation and the nuances that exist in “doing the right thing”.

An additional challenge with the staff at the hall has been the fact that they are unionized and the ways in which these unions have tried to block revolutionary efforts in redefining juvenile justice. Almost every single interview participant mentioned the power of unions in the political process in San Francisco. One participant went as far as to say that “nobody gets elected in this city if they are seen as taking jobs or if they go against the union because the union is deep in bed with everybody at City Hall” (Interviewee F). While many participants stated that they “supported unions” and how “important” they are, they also acknowledged how they have made change difficult. One interviewee shared a particularly telling story about this:

I remember the first effort in the 80s was the Jefferson report which was a report that was commissioned by the Superior Court where they found that they spent about \$400,000 back then on this report. They brought in experts from the Justice Department, technical assistance experts for the Justice Department, which was then the HW Bush Justice Department, and they came out and decried San Francisco's overuse of detention. I remember I knew the guy who was one of the main authors of the report and I remember him telling me once that he got cornered by the head of the Union, he was a probation officer, and he was head of the union. And he cornered the author in the hallway up at the Youth Guidance Center and told him that, you know, he doesn't understand what this is about - that this is not about kids, this is about jobs. And he was mad at the author because they were suggesting reductions in the juvenile hall population. I've never heard anyone better explain it more pointedly poignant, about explaining the reality of it all. (Interviewee D)

Although this story was from back in the 80s and there has been union representation and support of the current process, many participants feel like they are still trying to block change, that they are prioritizing jobs over what is best for children in San Francisco. This tension with the unions reveals yet another example of this *progressive dystopia* and the ways in which enacting revolutionary change is far more complex than these right/left dichotomies and the appearance of a united progressive front. Supporting unions is a fundamental part of the progressive platform but this case study demonstrates how unions can actually block and become at odds with other progressive values, like redefining juvenile justice.

One of the most important things that this process has revealed is the tension between addressing larger deep-rooted systematic issues and the reality of what a single piece of legislation can achieve. One participant perfectly captured the complexity of the task at hand as follows: “The most heinous things that young people do come from the inability to get the resources that they need in order to receive the rehabilitation that they need to not do the things that actually put them in the system” (Interviewee H). This quote draws attention to the fact that addressing the root causes of youth crime goes far beyond a single department or piece of legislation. The issues that young people face that lead to them ending up in the hall are complex

and addressing these issues is much deeper than just closing down the physical building. Redefining juvenile justice means redistributing wealth and access to resources, not just moving away from incarceration. Participants mentioned solutions like reparations, housing security, family supports, drug rehabilitation services, education reform, employment opportunities, universal basic income, health care, and more. These solutions obviously go far beyond the reach of a single department and actually span across almost every single department in the city.

My data analysis revealed an important collaborative effort that took place in a unique political window of opportunity which allowed for this historic legislation's passing. Despite this monumental moment in juvenile justice in San Francisco, further analysis revealed the various tensions that arose amidst the legislation's implementation and how even in the most progressive places, like San Francisco, there are challenges to enacting revolutionary change. Shange's conceptualization of a *progressive dystopia* and *carceral progressivism* help to illustrate these struggles and draw attention to the more nuanced and complex aspects of implementing progressive ideals in a larger carceral system. These findings are critical to informing future efforts to end youth incarceration and in understanding the first example of a city trying to do this.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.
– James Baldwin

It is important to acknowledge the value and necessity of this legislation. It provided a critical pathway in taking the first steps to face the grave injustice that is our juvenile justice system. The advocacy, political will, and public support that led to its passing is a crucial part in

beginning to dismantle a system that harms young people every single day. My research demonstrated the necessary conditions that led to a unique political window of opportunity in which this legislation could be written and passed. These conditions should be taken into consideration by any activists and city officials looking to engage in the process of shutting down their juvenile hall and reimagining their juvenile justice system. The legislation solidified the city's commitment to engaging in this work and ensured that space and resources were allocated to developing a plan to do so. Without the allocation of time, resources, and space to these efforts there would have been little chance of any real change. Activists and city officials across the country should look to San Francisco to understand what it takes to create a window of opportunity in which passing this legislation is possible.

Although this legislation is critically important in many ways, my research shows that the limitations of this legislation must be acknowledged in order to draw attention to the need for larger systemic change. The various tensions revealed in my data collection process expose the difficulties of trying to enact revolutionary change, even in a city as progressive as San Francisco. The concept of a *progressive dystopia* serves as a framework to understand how these efforts illuminate the blurry line between the progressive imaginary and its actualization that take place against the backdrop of grave societal inequities and injustice. It helps to contextualize the tensions between what appeared to be shared goals and values and how they broke down in the efforts to bring them to fruition.

Shange's concept of *carceral progressivism* pushes us to take a more critical look at disentangling intention and impact and draws attention to the ways in which progressive reform efforts can often reproduce new versions of the same harmful systems they aim to change. This concept helps us to understand the complexities of addressing the root causes of youth crime and

the need to go beyond traditional right/left dichotomies and take a more nuanced approach in efforts to create positive change. The framework of *carceral progressivism* serves as a warning that efforts to reimagine San Francisco's juvenile justice system must be paired with larger systemic change and a part of a societal shift away from incarceration. If it is not, San Francisco children are at risk of continuing to experience harm and trauma and the conditions that marginalize them and their families that ultimately lead to youth crime will persist.

Although San Franciscans acknowledge that institutionalizing young people does not work, they must be careful that they are not taking a wrench to its juvenile hall, when it actually requires a wrecking ball. "A great strength of our democracy, our reformist nature is also a critical weakness, blinding us to those occasions when a long-standing institution has a fundamental conceptual flaw – the kind that demands not a wrench but a wrecking ball" (Bernstein 2014, 307). This legislation cannot be seen as the end-all solution to supporting young people and ending youth crime. There is no single program or decision that can do this, it requires a much larger cultural shift that encompasses a multigenerational and collaborative approach from various stakeholders. That is, addressing the grave inequities that exist in opportunities, resources, and support services for young people and their families in this country. This acknowledgement does not absolve young people of any personal responsibility in their decision-making but rather points to the larger structural barriers that put certain children, most disproportionately children of color, in more risky situations with fewer choices. This creates a sense of public responsibility that draws attention to the various other systems that contribute to these inequities and also desperately need transformative change including education, health care, housing, etc.

In acknowledging that this legislation is an important first step in a much larger effort, it is critical to understand the tensions that have arisen so far and how these difficulties have threatened the revolutionary potential of this work. In doing so, San Francisco provides an important case study for other city's looking to engage in this work and helps them to understand how they can ensure a smoother implementation process. As such, I propose a series of recommendations that are meant to mediate these tensions and address ways to challenge the systems that reintroduce oppressive logic and practices.

Recommendation #1:

As a part of the legislative writing process, any city looking to reimagine their juvenile justice system should engage in a mediation process around what their values mean and how they see them being actualized. In other words, what do the real-life implementation of the various stakeholders' values and goals look like? This is a critical step in ensuring that everyone involved in the process is on the same page and has a shared understanding of the work ahead. Having a process in place to do this is important because it creates space for mediation of disagreements and forces individuals to grapple with the process of fully articulating how they see their values translating. This could include creating a shared values documents with definitional frameworks for their interpretation which would ultimately serve as a framework for how the legislation is written.

Clarifying and defining value meanings from the beginning will ensure a smoother transition to the working groups and prevent the frustration that ultimately undermines the collaborative nature of the group. In the case of San Francisco, the legislation outlined a tight timeline that (among other things) was delayed by the need to mediate and clarify the very

slogan that these efforts were built around. In order to ensure that the working group can effectively work together, it is necessary to have a framework for what the end goal will look like be and what the potential limitations to this vision will be. Ultimately, making space for this to occur before the legislation is written and passed will ensure that those involved can focus on making the best plan possible and not be worried about clarifying fundamental guiding assumptions and principles while they are supposed to be focused on developing a plan.

It is important to note that this recommendation does expect that those involved would have a complete vision for what exactly the end result will be, that is part of what the legislation establishes, a place for that work to occur. But it is absolutely necessary to ensure at the very least that those involved clarify and articulate their guiding values and that they understand the framework and the potential limitations of what alternatives can look like. Otherwise, the momentum and potential of the legislation are undercut by what is “realistic” which creates tension and distrust between individuals who are supposed to be working together and once saw each other as potential allies.

Recommendation #2:

In order to alleviate some of the difficulties related to the bureaucratic nature of this process, working group subcommittees should have a different status in relation to the Brown Act. This law severely limited the ways in which subcommittee members could engage with one another and actually get the work done. Because of this law, the process was delayed, it made it more difficult for members to truly work in partnership, and it may ultimately undermine the alternative plan and recommendations that the group develops. Although transparency and ensuring there is space for the public to engage is critical, it shouldn't be at the cost of getting the

work don't effectively and efficiently. For other cities looking to engage in this work and are affected by the Brown Act, this status change would ensure that subcommittee members could communicate in real-time and would make it easier for a collaborative process to occur. This is necessary because collaboration between a cross-section of experts is a critical part of what will make the alternative(s) the best they can be.

Transparency and public input would not be lost as subcommittees could be required to report out at the larger working group meetings to ensure everyone is aware of the work that is happening behind the scenes. Members of other subcommittees and the larger working group would also still have the opportunity to give feedback and respond when these reports are shared with the group. This change in status would alleviate a lot of the frustration that participants experienced and prevent the need for sidebar work that is occurring and ultimately undermining the very intentions and goals of these groups. In order to work towards creating more revolutionary change, it is important to change the systems and practices that make engaging in this work more difficult than it needs to be. Although changing the status of these subcommittees is a seemingly minor recommendation, it is often the combination of smaller efforts that ultimately create space for revolutionary change to occur. This subtle revision to the law is a small part of the much larger and necessary changes that need to occur to change our bureaucratic processes that make engaging in this work more difficult and exhausting than it needs to be.

Recommendation #3:

Any city looking to close down their juvenile hall should ensure that the complexities regarding questions of what will happen to the staff that works there and the role that their unions will play in the process is a central part of conversations. The reality is, that unions have a

lot of power and they can block efforts to create transformative change in juvenile justice. This is important to consider because staffing is a large budget item within a city's Probation Department. For many people involved in the efforts in San Francisco, they thought that closing down the hall meant shrinking the Juvenile Probation's staffing department to next to nothing. This interpretation matters because it would mean that there would be significant funds freed up that could be reinvested in the community. As this project addressed, the massive amounts of spending on youth incarceration is hugely problematic. Reallocating these funds is a critical part of reimagining what could exist as alternatives and ensuring that there is greater investment in preventative services and support systems. If staff are simply repurposed in new roles within the same department, then there is significantly less possibility for a reimagining of the system. Money matters and if there are not significant funds made available to be reinvested in community-based alternatives and additional support systems, then these programs will struggle to be successful.

The added complexity of many of these staff being people of color themselves also needs to be at the forefront of conversations. It is important to consider the impact of this loss of work on their communities and there should be conversations about what opportunities could exist for them outside of the Probation Department. Ultimately, there needs to be an acknowledgement that in the long-term shrinking the probation department will positively impact their larger community but there also needs to be an acknowledgement of the impact this will have in the immediate on individuals and their families. Legislation to close down a juvenile hall should be focused on the well-being of children, not the staff that works there but there should be a commitment from the city to support them in figuring out the next steps. This could mean finding ways to reclassify their positions to other departments outside of the probation or

referring them to services that will support their efforts in finding new employment outside of the city. This commitment from the city is important in negotiating with the union but also in being clear that there will no longer be jobs available to them in the alternatives because the goal is to reinvest those funds into community.

Recommendation #4:

The responsibility of fixing the conditions that perpetuate youth crime cannot fall on the Probation Department and youth-serving community-based organizations alone, it must be an interdepartmental and multigenerational approach. While it is necessary to leverage experts who work with young people and those who have been involved in the system itself, it is also necessary to bring other folks to the table. The reasons that youth engage in crime are complex and far-reaching - they go beyond individual decisions and extend to their family and their communities. While this initial piece of legislation brings together stakeholders from the community, Probation Department, CBOs, and San Francisco Unified School District – future legislation should mandate a more intersectional approach that incorporates other departments like the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development, Environment Department, Healthy San Francisco, Homelessness and Supportive Housing, and more.

Ending the conditions that lead to youth crime requires the development of an ecosystem of care that goes beyond youth services. Programs that aim to serve and support youth who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in the system must also refer services and resources to those young people’s families and caretakers to address their needs as well. This could include access to food and other basic needs, substance abuse support, employment services, etc. There has to be an acknowledgement from other adult-serving city departments and CBOs that a lot of

the work that they do is interconnected to issues with our juvenile justice system. In order to uplift and support young people in San Francisco and for the closure of the hall to be seen as a success story it will take a collaborative, interdisciplinary, multi-generational approach. Future legislation should acknowledge this and draw other stakeholders into the conversation to build this ecosystem of care that ultimately supports all people, young and old, living in the city of San Francisco.

Recommendation #5:

This thesis calls for the need for further study in order to understand the implications of how federal and state laws will impact San Francisco's ability to truly reimagine its juvenile justice system. Since my data collection occurred in the middle of this process, understanding how the rest of this process played out is critical to informing future efforts. Understanding what the alternative(s) San Francisco decides on looks like, whether or not they are able to meet the proposed deadline, and how they end up mediating some of the expressed tensions is necessary in order to build upon the existing recommendations. One of the biggest challenges for San Francisco will be creating an alternative that is compliant with state and federal laws, so that young people are not sent further away, but is not a recreation of the same carceral institution that existed before it. Further study should answer the question of whether or not this is possible if San Francisco can end the incarceration of young people in its city or if revolutionary change is only possible by transforming the larger system first.

Further study should also take a longitudinal approach to understand the impact and success of what San Francisco develops as an alternative. Just as it was critical to understand the implementation process of this legislation, it will be critical to analyze the actual shift to the

alternative(s) that San Francisco implements. It will be important to measure the impact that this will have on young people in San Francisco and if it is, whether or not it is a model that other cities can replicate. There will likely be more barriers and tensions along the way so further research should seek to understand what those are to build a more complete picture of this process.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. I know how busy you are and really appreciate you allowing me to share space with you and engage in a discussion about juvenile justice.

Background: As I mentioned in my email, I am writing my graduate thesis on San Francisco's decision to close its juvenile hall and I'm really looking to better understand the advocacy efforts that went into this and learn about the successes and challenges of the process/working group so far. I have worked with kids in various settings and capacities throughout my entire life and more recently, over the last couple of years I have engaged in advocacy efforts here in the city to elevate the needs of youth and families. I am extremely passionate about supporting and uplifting young people and I am excited to be sitting with you today.

Reminders: This interview will last 30 min to an hour and before we start, I would like to remind you that you have the right to skip any questions you do not wish to answer or end this interview all together at any time. I would also like to remind you that I will not be publishing the full interview record, I will only include excerpts in my thesis. Do you have any questions about the anonymity of the process?

Before we begin, I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview?

How did you come to care about juvenile justice/why is it important to you?

In your opinion, what are the responsibilities of our juvenile justice system? In an ideal world what should the system be doing for young people?

As you are aware, in 2019 the BOS voted unanimously to close San Francisco's juvenile hall, making it the first city in the nation to do so. I am interested in what allowed San Francisco to be the first city to actually get this vote through. Can you talk about what kind of political systems or attitudes about advocacy exist here in San Francisco that you think made this possible?

Can you describe the specific activist efforts and strategies that went into passing the vote to close the hall - both with the public and inside city hall?

- (*)Can you give me a specific example of ____?

Who were the key figures or organizations that were critical to passing the vote?

Describe how these groups worked together to accomplish this goal?

- (*)Can you give me a specific example of ____?

Now that we are a little further along in the process, what would you say have been the greatest successes of the various working groups in working through the closure?

What are the current challenges in actualizing the closure - both in the working groups and

beyond?

- (*) Has the timeline for the closure of the hall shifted?
- (*) How confident are you that juvenile hall will be closed?

Thank you for helping me understand the challenges. Now, I want to shift a little bit to think about solutions.

(-)How do the working groups and activists hope to address these challenges?

What support systems and alternative programs do you think should exist for young people in place of San Francisco's juvenile hall? What are some of the options being discussed?

So thinking about the larger impact of this decision and its effect on other systems in the city I think about the school-to-prison pipeline. Which I will quickly define for you to make sure we have a shared understanding.

The school-to-prison pipeline is a phenomenon that explains a system of laws and practices that push children out of school and into the juvenile justice system. Do you think the closure of the hall and the investment in alternatives will supply a model for dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline nationally?

- If yes, why and how?
- If no, why not? What more needs to be done?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about the closure of juvenile hall?

Conclusion: I just want to thank you so much for sitting down with me today. I really appreciate your work on this issue and all of the insight that you have shared with me. It was especially helpful when you discussed_____.

And lastly, I will be sending a quick follow-up email tomorrow morning where I will include two optional follow-ups - one is a place for you to share the names of anyone else you think would be important to include in this process. And second, I will give you information about how to see the results of my research once they are done.