



March 18, 2022

Re: AB 1670 (Bryan) - Alternatives to Incarceration Commission - Support

Representatives of the Honorable San Fernando Valley Delegation:

The Democratic Party of the San Fernando Valley is writing to express our support for AB 1670 — Alternatives to Incarceration Commission — a bill that would create a statewide Commission on Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) within the California Health and Human Services Agency. This is a critical first step in moving towards common sense “care first, jails last” values across California. This bill will require research and analysis to highlight the continuum of care solutions that vulnerable Californians need, rather than the default of costly punitive solutions which only worsen county jail crises.

The need for evidence-based, scalable, and replicable alternatives to incarceration is dire in California counties—many of which have higher than average incarceration rates and fewer alternatives to jails. Many counties maintain a patchwork of so-called “alternatives” that remain punitive and costly for impacted persons, their families, and even the counties themselves. These “alternatives,” such as probation oversight with electronic monitoring, sheriff’s work projects (coerced labor), and unscalable collaborative courts, are often gateways to re-incarceration.

Currently, Los Angeles County is the only county in the state with a “care first, jails last” ATI commission. Their commission created over 100 recommendations to transform health and safety in their community. The implementation of these recommendations is still underway, but what has been accomplished at the county-level provides a vision of a reformed statewide criminal legal system that places the health, safety, and wellbeing of its residents above ineffective mass incarceration policies.

AB 1670 will address some of our communities’ deepest systemic questions:

- What opportunities exist to break the cycle that traps people with mental health and substance use disorders between homelessness and jail?
- How can our justice system be more effective by making community-based mental health and substance use disorder treatment and stable housing available to all?
- How can neighborhoods create safer communities by shifting thinking from a frame of punishment to one of public health?
- How can the justice system be reshaped by elevating the voices of the people most impacted by homelessness, crisis, and incarceration?
- How might communities better address the legacy of racism and disinvestment, and other social determinants of health, that has resulted in locking up Black and Brown people disproportionately?

Addressing the questions above, among others, is just a start. Staggeringly high incarceration and re-arrest rates indicate that the current criminal legal justice system isn’t working. Programs that address root causes of criminalization—such as trauma-informed, community-based mental health care and substance use disorder treatment, and assistance with housing and other basic needs—are scarce. A statewide



commission on ATI could begin to address this opportunity gap where residents and their loved ones simply do not have knowledge of or access to meaningful alternatives to incarceration.

We strongly urge you to support AB 1670 which is a critical first step in studying, assessing and sharing effective and care-centered alternatives to incarceration. For the reasons stated above, we strongly support AB 1670 (Bryan).

Please note that DPSFV will be tracking this bill as it travels through the Legislature. Your voting record will be noted and may be considered should you ever seek our endorsement. Your office is always welcome to contact DPSFV if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean M. Rivas'.

Chair Sean M. Rivas
Democratic Party of the San Fernando Valley