



## YOUTH COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Dirk Beijan, President, Juvenile Probation Commission  
Honorable Members, Juvenile Probation Commission  
William P. Siffermann, Chief of Juvenile Probation

**CC:** Allen A. Nance, Assistant Chief Probation Officer

**FROM:** Youth Commission Youth Justice Committee  
Commissioner Angel Carrion, Chair  
Commissioner Ramon Gomez  
Commissioner Paul Monge-Rodriguez

**DATE:** Wednesday, June 12, 2013

**RE:** Clarifying position on the potential arming of juvenile probation officers

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### Background:

In February, the Youth Commission passed a resolution 12-13 "Urging the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to Urge the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department Not to Equip SOP Unit Probation Officers with Firearms," wherein the San Francisco Youth Commission urged the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to urge the Juvenile Probation Department not to begin arming juvenile probation officers with firearms as part of any revised probation officer safety protocol.

Since that time, Chief Siffermann informed the Youth Commission of his proposal to export probation officers performing high risk peace officer duties to SFPD for arming protocols, rather than creating a unit of armed probation officers within JPD.

At the May 2, 2013 hearing with the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Neighborhood Services and Safety Committee, members of the Youth Commission Youth Justice Committee highlighted several outstanding questions they had regarding the new proposal for a joint task force with SFPD. At the May 2013 Juvenile Probation Commission meeting, it was noted that the Youth Commission had not registered opposition to the new proposal during the May 2, 2013 hearing.

The Youth Commission recently approved<sup>1</sup> its 12-13 Budget and Policy priorities document (*attached*), which includes a priority urging against the arming of juvenile probation officers, and

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Commission Policy & Budget Priorities FYs 13-14, 14-15 :  
<http://www.sfbos.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=45495>

in support of the already-successful rehabilitative approach to juvenile probation exercised by the Juvenile Probation Department. This memorandum, and the attached policy priority, is meant to clarify the Youth Commission's position in regards to the arming of juvenile probation officers.

While Youth Commissioners are pleased to hear that JPD has dropped plans for the department to take on internal arming procedures, the Commission is still awaiting an assessment of the time frame, training protocols, and costs associated with the proposed joint task force. Youth Commissioners continue to have outstanding concerns about the general trend toward militarizing Juvenile Probation, and note that such procedural changes to arm juvenile probation officers have not taken place in several surrounding counties' probation departments.

It is not clear how the proposed task force substantively differs from the existing relationship between JPD and the police department's Gang Task Force (GTF). Further, it is unclear why the Chief is pursuing heavier enforcement strategies at this time, given that in 2012, San Francisco experienced the lowest rate of juvenile homicides in recorded history, suggesting that the rehabilitative approach to juvenile probation that has characterized Chief Siffermann's tenure has been consistent with positive public safety outcomes. We ask the Juvenile Probation Commission to consider the assessment of the United Probation Officers Association in New York, who found that arming probation officers was inconsistent with safety goals, when they reported that armed probation officers did not have to use their weapons on the job once between 2003 and 2009, but that issued firearms were involved in the suicides of multiple probation officers during the same period.<sup>2</sup>

The Youth Commission does not believe the need to arm juvenile probation officers has been substantiated by any body of evidence, and does not support the arming of juvenile probation officers as part of any revised field safety protocol. The Youth Commission appreciates Chief Siffermann's consideration of youth and community feedback thus far, and for the attention of the Juvenile Probation Commission to this matter. We look forward to continuing this dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Hallissey, Tommy, "Probation Union: Guns Deadly for Members," published August 21, 2009 in *The Chief-Civil Service Leader*

# Priority # 5: Urging Against the Arming of Juvenile Probation Officers

In support of the already-successful rehabilitative approach to juvenile probation, and recommending against the arming of juvenile probation officers in any revised field safety protocol.

## **Background**

At a January 9, 2013 meeting of the Juvenile Probation Commission, Chief Juvenile Probation Officer, William Siffermann, announced, subsequent to a presentation by Assistant Chief Allen Nance entitled “Juvenile Probation Officer Field Safety and Monitoring Compliance: The Changing Landscape of Community Corrections and Supervision of High Risk Offenders,” that he was “examining those existing safety measures provided to Juvenile Probation Officers” who work with the most violent and highest-risk youth, and that he planned to develop a revised safety protocol for the Juvenile Probation Department’s (JPD) probation officers to be announced sometime in April 2013. It was reported that one possible such revision will be equipping probation officers in the Serious Offender Program (SOP) unit with firearms.<sup>3</sup> Several community members and juvenile justice advocates spoke out against the proposal, and the Youth Commission adopted a resolution urging against the arming of Juvenile Probation Officers in February 2013.<sup>4</sup>

Chief Siffermann has repeatedly argued that revisions to JPD’s safety protocol are a result of state criminal and juvenile justice realignment, and he has repeatedly referred to a potentially fatal incident on September 20, 2012 in which juvenile probation officers, working in tandem with San Francisco Police Department police officers, encountered a violent youth probationer, as an example of the need for a revised safety protocol.

While one of the stated values and beliefs of the JPD is that “data-driven decision-making ensures positive outcomes,”<sup>5</sup> the necessity of equipping juvenile probation officers with firearms has not yet been substantiated by any body of evidence, nor has evidence been presented suggesting that arming juvenile probation officers with firearms will lead to a reduction in violent incidents or an enhancement of public safety. One of the main premises behind making the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) an entity separate and distinct from other adult law enforcement agencies—an act that distinguishes San Francisco from all other counties in the state of California—was the importance of differentiating JPD from an armed approach to juvenile justice, and also to provide a more specialized focus on youth rehabilitative service needs.

There is a lack of clarity on the need for JPD probation officers to participate in operations that would seem to categorically fall under the purview of the City’s law enforcement strategies (like the September 20, 2012 incident), and the participation of JPD probation officers in such operations would seem to expose these officers to unnecessary risks and dangers. The Deputy Probation Officers Association (DPOA), the labor organization representing the interests of the Probation Officers whose caseloads include these high risk juveniles, has recommended that a “renewed focus on training of officers for these new, more dangerous situations, should be emphasized.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “SF juvenile probation chief explores arming officers,” Amy Julia Harris, December 21, 2012, *The Bay Citizen*, <https://www.baycitizen.org/news/crime/youth-probation-officers-sf-may-get-guns>

<sup>4</sup> San Francisco Youth Commission Resolution 1213-AL 11 “Urging the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to Urge the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department Not to Equip SOP Unit Probation Officers with Firearms,” adopted February 19, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> <http://sfgov3.org/index.aspx?page=2262>

<sup>6</sup> <http://sfgov3.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=3641>

## **Recent Updates**

At the April 2013 Juvenile Probation Commission meeting, Chief Siffermann asserted during his closing remarks that he had dropped any plans to create an armed unit of probation officers within JPD, but rather, was proposing to export some juvenile probation officers to SFPD for arms training in order to work on a joint SFPD-JPD task force that would carry out the most high-risk peace officer activities assigned to probation officers<sup>7</sup>.

While Youth Commissioners are pleased to hear that JPD has dropped plans for the department to take on arming procedures within the department, the Commission is still awaiting an assessment of the time frame, training protocols, and costs associated with the proposed joint task force. Youth Commissioners continue to have outstanding concerns about the general trend toward militarizing Juvenile Probation, and note that such procedural changes to arm juvenile probation officers have not taken place in several surrounding counties' probation departments.<sup>8</sup>

It is not clear how the proposed task force substantively differs from the existing relationship between JPD and the police department's Gang Task Force (GTF). Further, it is unclear why the Chief is pursuing heavier enforcement strategies at this time, given that in 2012, San Francisco experienced the lowest rate of juvenile homicides in recorded history,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that the rehabilitative approach to juvenile probation that has characterized Chief Siffermann's eight-year tenure has been consistent with positive public safety outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

The Youth Commission appreciates Chief Siffermann's responsibility to ensure that the men and women under his command are safe. We call on the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to urge the Juvenile Probation Department not to begin arming juvenile probation officers with firearms as part of any revised safety protocol, and to hold Chief Siffermann to his assertion that the Juvenile Probation Department will not take on arming protocols for its probation officers. The Youth Commission is grateful for the leadership of the Board of Supervisor's Neighborhood Services and Safety committee in holding a hearing on May 2, 2013 aimed at clarifying several aspects of JPD's proposed safety protocol revisions.

The Youth Commission would like to submit that any plan to handle high-risk juvenile offenders should work to preserve the social work ideals of the only stand-alone juvenile probation department in the state. Under no circumstances should an armed juvenile probation officer act as the primary case contact for a juvenile probationer, and JPD should undertake all possible efforts to minimize contact between police and juvenile probationers to avoid incidences of recidivism. Therefore, the criteria for youth referral to the proposed task force, and number of youth affected should be made clear.

We also urge the Juvenile Probation Department to identify practical tools and alternative practices, other than firearms, that will help to address personal safety concerns for probation officers whose caseloads include high-risk juveniles. The Youth Commission urges the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to urge the Juvenile Probation Department, per the DPOA's recommendation, to provide new training for probation officers who will supervise high-risk offenders.

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<sup>7</sup> Chief Siffermann's April 10, 2013 presentation to the Juvenile Probation Commission <http://sfgov3.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=4346>

<sup>8</sup> Chief Siffermann's April 10, 2013 presentation to the Juvenile Probation Commission

<sup>9</sup> Juvenile homicides were lower than any time since statistics had begun being collected in the 1960's. See: Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice December 2012 Report, "San Francisco 2012: Out Least Violent Generation?" [http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/San\\_Francisco\\_Youth\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/San_Francisco_Youth_2012.pdf)