

A Pastoral Letter to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors re REACH Operations Lead

March 18, 2018

Dear Supervisors Haggerty, Valle, Chan, Miley, and Carson:

Eden Church has been engaged in ministry with young people in the Eden Area for over 150 years, and we have been engaged in the design and development of the Ashland REACH Youth Center since I came to Eden over 15 years ago. Our commitment to the wellbeing of young people and our awareness that you share this commitment have inspired me to address you about the operational leadership of REACH.

Supervisor Miley announced at the EALI Joint Leadership Meeting held at Eden Church on January 25, 2018 that the operations lead for the Ashland REACH Youth Center will shift from the Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) to the Deputy Sheriff's Activity League (DSAL) on July 1, 2018. Supervisor Miley said that the change in operations lead for REACH was occurring because DSAL was fully capable of serving in this way. There was no mention of REACH's history of running operating deficits, and there was no clarification about how long the Sheriff would be willing and able to fund REACH's deficits.

Supervisor Miley's efforts to secure funding for the operation of REACH, the Sheriff's willingness to help, and DSAL's innovative approach to community policing are very commendable, but **REACH needs more than an infusion of cash and a law-enforcement-sponsored recreation program to fulfill its mission.**

To fulfill its stated mission of "creating a culture of safety, belonging, equity and happiness..." **REACH needs to recruit and engage the most vulnerable youth in our community.** Unfortunately, REACH will not be successful in this endeavor with a law enforcement agency at the helm. Many of the neediest youth in our community do not trust law enforcement, because their families have had negative interactions with the criminal justice system or they fear that their family's information will be shared with ICE.

REACH needs an operational lead with a highly developed set of technical skills in order to coordinate an integrated program of healthcare, education, library, employment, art, and recreational services. Placing operations in the hands of an entity without experience in all of REACH's service areas would jeopardize REACH's ability to attract capable vendors and hamper DSAL's ability to do what it does best.

An RFP for REACH's operations lead should be developed and vetted by County staff and representatives of key stakeholder groups. If a capable entity is not identified by July 1, 2018, then I recommend that an oversight committee comprised of County leaders and representatives of community stakeholder groups be recruited and appointed by the Board to operate REACH until a suitable lead can be identified or created.

REACH also needs a more robust and sustainable funding plan to insure mission fulfillment. Appointing an entity as operational lead primarily for budgetary reasons would only meet an immediate need. It would not protect REACH from financial ruin in the future. The next Sheriff may not fund REACH. The priorities of the current Sheriff may change, or funding may dry up. The long-term viability of REACH is dependent on developing a robust funding plan and fiscal oversight by an operations lead with a proven record in both areas.

Please contact me if you have questions about this letter or would like to further explore this proposed course of action or alternative courses of action for the future of REACH. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,



The Rev. Dr. Arlene K. Nehring, Senior Minister