

# Youth and NORA

## The Nonviolent Offender Rehabilitation Act of 2008



California currently offers virtually no publicly funded substance abuse treatment options for youth under the age of 18. This tragic and short-sighted failure abandons young people to their drug problems, putting their safety, their physical and mental health, and their futures at risk. Families, too often, have nowhere to turn for help.

A new ballot measure, the Nonviolent Offender Rehabilitation Act (NORA), will invest in treatment for at-risk youth. NORA is expected to appear on the Nov. 4, 2008, ballot.

As part of a comprehensive, common-sense solution to the prison overcrowding crisis, the measure would create a system of care for at-risk youth by:

- Dedicating annual funding of at least \$65 million per year for youth treatment programs, as well as about \$4 million more from fines collected from adults for low-level marijuana offenses;
- Ensuring that the new system of care meets the spectrum of youth needs, including family therapy, mental health interventions, educational and employment stipends, and more; and
- Requiring science-based educational programs and counseling, instead of a misdemeanor conviction, for young people found in possession of small amounts of marijuana.

Too often today, young Californians with drug problems get tied up in the juvenile justice system and may even be incarcerated. Juvenile arrest rates for drug offenses increased by 39 percent in the past few years, but less than 10 percent of adolescents in need of substance abuse treatment received it in the publicly funded system. Many of these young people go on to become adult offenders. This destructive path has played a part in the state's prison overcrowding crisis.

NORA will foster development of programs for young people regardless of whether they have become involved in the juvenile justice system. Counties could offer programs to youth and families by way of a school referral, a doctor's recommendation or the family's own decision that some treatment is necessary. And by encouraging evidence-based best practices, both through the statewide leadership of experts and stakeholders and through comprehensive studies, NORA will help these programs to evolve to better serve at-risk young people in the years to come.

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Paid for by NORA Campaign, sponsored by Campaign for New Drug Policies and Drug Policy Alliance Network

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