



For Immediate Release: Monday, December 5th, 2015

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When: Tuesday, December 6th @6-8pm

Where: Richfield Community Center, 7000 Nicollet Ave, Richfield, MN

Youth Prison Blockaders to Protest Proposed Joint County Juvenile Facility, Demand Answers of County Officials

The Youth Prison Blockade along with members of other community organizations will gather to protest the proposed joint county juvenile prison in Richfield this Tuesday. Hennepin and Ramsey counties are set to build a new 165-bed prison for youth that would vastly increase youth detention capacity in the Twin Cities. Community members are adamantly opposed and will speak out at Tuesday's meeting, the fourth in a series of seven "community conversations" the counties have used to sell their plan to the public.

Youth prisons foster punishment and abuse, are ineffective, and funnel young people into the adult criminal injustice system. In the words of Tonja Honsey, one of the catalysts for the formation of the Youth Prison Blockade, "the county is claiming this 165 bed facility will only serve 'high risk' youth. I was considered high risk for running away from an abusive home. I was issued my prison Offender Identification (OID) Number and spent 6 months in solitary confinement for running away from home. This system is locking children up in cages for surviving the only way they know how." At a price tag of 38 million dollars just for construction, blockaders assert this effort would expand cycles of state violence and punishment instead of funding critical programs for youth.

This project would target poor youth, particularly Black and Native youth. According to a 2010 report from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Office of Juvenile Justice, youth of color made up 22 percent of the population but 58 percent of youth locked up prior to adjudication and 50 percent of those caged after being committed to custody. They assert the counties are using smokescreens of "racial equity" and "expanding treatment services" to distract the public. This project is not about caring for youth, but generating profits by shipping in youth from out of state and expanding corrections industry jobs.

Blockaders are pushing for an alternative vision. Blockaders want to close down all youth prisons. They want to keep youth in their neighborhoods by investing in community-based alternatives to confinement that are holistic, caring, and relationship based. They want funds for programs that promote positive youth development, expand mental health services, and support struggling parents. They want those 38 million dollars to be invested in community centers, schools, living wage jobs, and affordable housing to support working class communities, particularly those impacted by white supremacy and colonialism.

The Youth Prison Blockade campaign is being organized jointly by the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, the Social Justice Education Movement, and the General Defense Committee. These are committees of the Industrial Workers of the World.