



For Immediate Release: Friday, December 16th, 2015

Press Contact: Tonja Honsey (612) 750-7023

As Counties Reject New Youth Prison, Youth Prison Blockaders Vow to Continue Fight

On Wednesday, December 14th, the executive committee for the proposed joint county youth prison made a formal recommendation to end the project. They suggested closing the memorandum of understanding between counties and ending the contract with the architecture firm BWBR. County commissioners specifically referenced community opposition in making this decision. They cited escalating disruptions at community meetings intended to sell the project to the public as proof for why the facility was no longer tenable. Having co-lead the most recent disruption with My Generation at the Richfield Community Center, Youth Prison Blockaders celebrate this victory. In the words of Sophia Hansen-Day, an organizer with YPB, "This is what happens when we challenge the power structure, naming how the system targets oppressed and poor people for incarceration. We successfully rejected their false narratives to demand an alternative vision for our communities."

Youth Prison Blockaders recognize the work against the juvenile injustice system must continue. Tonja Honsey, former youth prisoner and lead organizer with YPB, said: "Though we see this as a victory, this is only one step towards our goal- to stop caging our youth." First, they recognize the committee's recommendation as non-binding and needing to be ratified by both Ramsey and Hennepin boards of commissions. Second, campaign organizers are mindful that while this joint county facility has been defeated, the struggle may just be shifting terrain. Ultimately, this project is about how the county chooses to allocate resources. Communities of color and working class communities experience cycles of violence instead of investment. This must change.

Youth Prison Blockaders do not believe county officials genuinely care about oppressed youth. While Hennepin County Home School and Boys Totem Town are dilapidated buildings, the choices presented to the public to either renovate or relocate are unacceptable. Blockaders want both facilities shut down. Decision makers have also pushed for changes in the risk assessment tools used to determine whether youth should be caged. Revising this policy to become even more punitive would result in filling more beds. Expanding treatment programs at these facilities that have a demonstrated history of abuse and funnel youth into the adult criminal justice system is not a solution. Blockaders want resources for intervention strategies that keep youth in their neighborhoods. They want investment in community-based alternatives to confinement that are holistic and relationship based. They want funds for community centers, schools, living wage jobs, and affordable housing in working class communities, particularly those impacted by white supremacy and colonialism.

In the words of Luther Wrathjoy, an organizer with YPB, "We are fighting back to change the violent relationship that working class, Black, Brown, and Native people have with the government. We will enforce the equitable distribution of resources through direct action. We will redirect our own energy as skilled working people to building the solutions we demand. We are building a world where communities and

working folk control their own lives. We will no longer be controlled by the authority of people who don't care about us."

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.