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CALIFORNIA YOUTH WITH MENTAL ILLNESS INCARCERATED WHEN COMMUNITY SERVICES UNAVAILABLE

WASHINGTON, DC — Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman released a report finding that over half of California's juvenile detention facilities inappropriately incarcerate youth waiting for mental health treatment. The report reveals:

- On an average night, over 250 California youth are jailed because community treatment services are not available;
- These youth are as young as eight years old;
- Some have no charges of any kind pending against them; and
- The estimated annual cost of inappropriate detention exceeds $10 million.

"It is dangerous, costly, and wrong to use jails as overflow for our mental health system," said Rep. Waxman. "Children who need treatment in their community should receive treatment without delay."

The report examines the response from administrators in 43 juvenile detention facilities throughout California, representing a response rate of 88%. Twenty-seven centers (representing 63% of those surveyed) reported holding youth unnecessarily because community mental health services were not available.

The report includes comments from detention center administrators. One wrote, "We are overwhelmed by the sheer number of mentally challenged youth that we must deal with." Another stated, "Children should not be housed in jail or juvenile detention to wait for services. There are not enough services for the many needs that we have."

The report finds that inappropriately held youth in California stay in detention for an average of 64 days, more than twice the average time spent by California youth as a whole and three times the average time spent by juvenile detainees nationally. Approximately one in eight youth incarcerated inappropriately in the nation each night waits in a California facility.

The complete report is available at http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov.