

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello,

I am Kristen Fury, you may know me, or may have heard of me or not, but for the purposes of today's letter that does not matter. I am writing as a concerned citizen, a concerned parent, an empathetic human and as someone who fully believes that YOU can make a difference in thousands of people's lives today. You may be wondering who it is I am speaking of, the answer is heavy, but simple, You can make a difference in the lives of every single foster child in San Diego County. As a past ward of the court and resident of San Pasqual Academy I am writing to you in a plea for understanding and begging for action and advocacy for the past, current and future residents of San Pasqual Academy.

I am writing in regard to the hundreds of people who learned that their home may be getting closed down in October of this year. I am writing in concern for every child living on that campus today. I am writing in concern for every alumni or student that ever called San Pasqual Academy home. I am writing for every staff present and past, every supervisor, every director, every judge, every therapist, every parent, every house parent, every CASA, every attorney, every rec therapist, every clinical therapist, every future resident that will suffer as the result of the loss of this amazing resource.

The loss of San Pasqual would be a CATASTROPHIC FAILURE, the blame of which will lay at the feet of any and every person who could have done something but chose not to.

The residents of San Pasqual, both past and present are not case numbers, they are not statistics, they are not some abstract concept that should be controlled or written off by any member of any government or private entity. They are humans, they are the most vulnerable of all humans to exist in our country. They are souls who have been let down by families, society, the media, the government, law enforcement and anything or everything else they have ever been told they could depend on. They are children who were failed by their biological parents, who endured further trauma at the systems failed attempts at rehabilitating parents who were woefully ill-equipped to handle the immense responsibility of raising children. These are children who have been failed repeatedly by the system as a whole, placed in foster homes where they were expected to immediately be able to integrate with what ever cultural or family system the foster family chose. Children who have been kicked out or removed from these placements due to their inability to adapt in such a way that the homes expectations were met or exceeded. These are children who have experienced life happening to them in the worst ways who believed that they had finally found a place where they could get their bearings and catch their breath. A place where they were told they would be able to be supported through the day to day struggles that standard society can't possibly understand and that the system designed to help them won't fully understand until they begin discussing these children like they are people and stop utilizing acronyms or labels to dissociate from the fact that the atrocities that they would rather not speak

about in public forums are continuously happening to these children, and often at the hands of the people that the county or state places them with.

Twenty years ago San Pasqual began as a social experiment, it was the brain child of many concerned individuals who saw a gaping wound in the foster care system of San Diego and whom made it their life's mission to correct it. San Pasqual was the first and only of its kind in the nation, it was an educational facility that housed foster youth. The original goal of San Pasqual was to create an environment where foster children would be provided with the unique resources they needed to successfully graduate from High School and then be assisted with transitioning into adult lives that were free from the suffering that they endured before. San Pasqual provided unique opportunities that foster children at the time could only dream of, the campus provided a safe, consistent place to grow, live, and learn with access to the resources that they had been told their whole life as foster children, that they would be provided, but honestly very rarely are. Therapists and social workers, accessible and on campus, a variety of staff and supervisors so that the student could connect and communicate with their choice of a trusted adult that could help them navigate their troubles or that could point them in the direction that they could go to get assistance with those troubles. You had a way to get your clothing and hygiene needs met, in such a way that was discreet and respectful. San Pasqual created an environment where students could learn about and exercise their autonomy with out being forced in to dynamics or expectations that were inequitable to their unique needs. San Pasqual provides its residents with many things that were not necessarily intended with its creation, it created a giant extended family where the residents were with peers, these bonds have lasted generations, these accidentally formed connections turned in to marriages, support circles, life partners and best friends, these relationships would have been impossible to form with out the existence of the beautiful social experiment that the current board of supervisors has now decided is unnecessary.

Education was not the only benefit of San Pasqual Academy, due to the size and set up of the campus siblings that previously had no chance of staying together could find a home and community support on campus. LGBTQ students had a safe and welcoming environment free of religious expectations or bias. The unique environment that the campus and its components provide have created results that blatantly went against the statistics that previously existed in the system in general. Another huge issue that San Pasqual accidentally addressed is recidivism, where a child that was in foster care has children that then need to be placed in foster care. All of this is invaluable and would be lost if the campus gets closed.

I understand the arguments as to why the campus should close, I was in a meeting today where it was stated over and over, reunification being the focus, providing resources to families and foster homes to serve the students. In this series of meetings other things were also discussed, some of those things were concerns about the county having faith in the social workers and supervisors that are supposed to be supporting the foster youth in the county. They discussed ways to make Work Force Partnership resources available to foster children, they discussed how to best get

children to therapy and doctors appointments, the puzzling thing about all of these subjects is that those issues are all addressed through San Pasqual, every one of them already exist successfully on the campus that the county is claiming is now not necessary. While the San Diego County Child & Family Strengthening Advisory Board had a lot to say, it was clear to see that they were all speaking from a place that lacked a true understanding of the fact that the closing of campus and the way that it was announced, caused an amount of trauma that the English Language can't possibly describe in its entirety. The phrase "These kids aren't going to be displaced." was repeated ad nauseam. This phrase speaks to the pure lack of understanding of the impact that these decisions, decisions that no one is willing to take responsibility for, are having on the current and past students of this amazing campus. The children that are currently enrolled at San Pasqual, who have been continuously failed by society and the system that was designed to protect them, have once again been failed with the way that the potential campus closing was announced, in a news paper, front page, on a Sunday. They were left reliving traumas with fears, anxieties and with so many questions that they could not get answered. They are and were being supported by staff that were informed in the same way with just as many questions as the children that they were and are trying to support and protect.

The other issue that has been presented as a reason for closure is low enrollment. This issue is unique only as it applies to legislation that was recently passed on a state level that puts an emphasis on reunification and makes it nearly impossible to remove children from homes unless the situation is so dire that many children are left in such a state where rehabilitation may not be an option. This creates situations where many children that should be removed from abusive environments are left to persevere through unimaginable situations while the county attempts to teach abusive, toxic people to be parents, which most often results in exit strategies for the child that are dangerous and most definitely not in their best interest.

Reunification is not always an option, and often times even when it is an option it is not the option with the child's best interest in the fore front. Foster families while they are definitely filled with well intending adults, are often spattered with a sense of being a second class citizen, or being the odd man out, which leads to levels of rebellion that very few adults are prepared to handle and often result in a lack of security and consistency. Saying that these children will be provided with the resources that they are receiving now in different avenues through additional programs feels like over complicating a system that has already proven itself time and time again since its founding. San Pasqual was established to address a collection of specific issues, it has done so in the face of adversity while many people who are in office were literally working against the program, San Pasqual continuously showed that the work done there was invaluable and irreplaceable in the lives of children and teens who previously were swept under the rug.

Only with the help of lawmakers and community support activists can we bring an end to this suffering and create a solution that truly puts children first. Do not let inaction be the beginning of more trauma for these vulnerable children to endure. These foster children are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable and it is our responsibility to help level the playing field of life in any way we can to benefit them.

With hopes that we can all work together to make life better for foster youth.

Sincerely,

Kristen Fury

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