Biography of Allen Breed

Allen Breed went to work for the California Youth Authority (CYA) soon after his return from World War II and continued there for more than 30 years. He began as a youth counselor hoping to save money to enter Stanford Law School. He became so committed to youth work that his legal education was placed on hold. Allen moved up through the CYA organization and became its director. Under his leadership, CYA became renowned worldwide for its innovative research and treatment programs. Allen Breed pioneered the Probation Subsidy Act that became the model for the expansion of community corrections in many states.

He greatly valued researchers as major partners in corrections and supported the earliest work on offender classification. Allen led the statewide effort to remove juvenile status offenders from secure confinement. He was a key advocate for the passage of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

President Jimmy Carter asked Allen Breed to lead the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Allen emphasized the use of research to improve corrections and sought to upgrade professional organizations in the field. At NIC, he placed early and focused attention on the vastly disproportionate number of people of color in jails and prisons. Allen fought to keep young people out of adult facilities and he challenged corrections officials to be leaders, not just “practiced survivors.” While at NIC, Allen Breed was instrumental in the passage of the federal Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act.

After leaving NIC, Allen took over the leadership of the Board of Directors of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency for a decade, and was central to saving that organization. He also began working on behalf of federal courts as a special master in cases involving prison and jail crowding, the provision of inmate medical care, and juvenile corrections systems in many states. He was highly effective in mediating conflicts between civil rights lawyers and corrections officials. For elected officials, the media and leaders in philanthropy, Allen Breed was the most authoritative and objective source on best practices.

Allen Breed passed away in July 2011 at the age of 90.