



Care First, Jails Last



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June 22, 2023

Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1221 Oak Street, Suite 536
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: Santa Rita Jail Expansion Project

On May 9, 2023, the Board of Supervisors adopted a Resolution designating \$26,662,922 of county match funding to construct a Mental Health Program and Services Unit Project ("MHPSU") at the Santa Rita Jail ("SRJ"). As explained in the Resolution (which accompanied the Agenda as Attachment #51), the full cost of this Jail Expansion Project is just over 81 million dollars, to be financed with \$54.3 million dollars from the State of California and \$26.6 million from Alameda County. The Resolution further suggests that the new building at SRJ is needed to accommodate increased staffing which will provide behavioral health care at the jail.¹

On May 18, 2023, Senator Nancy Skinner wrote to the Director of the State Dept. of Finance requesting that a number of questions about the proposed project be answered before the State approved the project. Senator Skinner set forth twelve questions that she wanted Alameda County to answer and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee to review before the matter was brought before the State Public Works Board for consideration. (See attachment).

The Care First Jail Last Task Force has discussed both the proposed Jail Expansion Project and Senator Skinner's letter to the Dept. of Finance. After much deliberation, the Task Force has voted in favor of a motion that the Jail Expansion Plan should not go forward at all, or at the very least, should be put on hold until the Task Force concludes its work and makes its recommendations to the Board of Supervisors in April 2024.

The Jail Expansion Project is antithetical to the County's "Care First, Jail Last" Resolution and to the work in which the Task Force is currently engaged. The Task Force is committed to designing a full continuum of behavioral healthcare that will significantly reduce the number of people with mental illness, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders in our jail.

¹ The jail expansion plan originated in 2015 with a proposal to construct a new unit at the jail at a cost of \$61.6 million dollars, with the state of California providing \$54.3 million and Alameda County providing an additional \$7.2 million. The new plan greatly expands the scope and design of the original plan.

Rather than spend 26.6 million dollars to construct a new building at Santa Rita Jail (which would constitute a “Jail First” policy), the County must invest in the kind of facilities and programs which will divert mentally ill people out of jail and into medically appropriate treatment.

Moreover, the Task Force questions the rationale of building the new MHPSU to accommodate the additional ACBH staff at the jail. According to the most recent figures from the experts who are assisting in the *Babu* Consent Decree, as much as 70% of ACBH positions at the jail are still vacant, three years later.

Finally, while Santa Rita Jail has a rated capacity of over 3,700 incarcerated people, it is currently half-full, today holding less than 1,800 individuals, with proposals to reduce that number through the Reimagining Adult Justice initiative and no evidence that the population will increase in the future. The original staffing analysis on which the *Babu* settlement was based assumed a jail population of as many as 3,000 persons. The Task Force questions whether all the unused space at the jail could be repurposed and redesigned, as opposed to constructing a new 81-million-dollar building.

For all these reasons, the Task Force urges that the Board of Supervisors put the Jail Expansion Project on hold and instead prioritize investments in community-based services that have been proven to reduce crime and recidivism.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Care First, Jail Last Task Force if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Brian Bloom
CFJL Data Ad Hoc Committee Chair

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