



June 7, 2021

TO: Das Williams, First District  
Gregg Hart, Second District  
Joan Hartmann, Third District  
Bob Nelson, Fourth District and Chair  
Steve Lavagnino, Fifth District

Re: Budget Hearing--Sheriff Department

Dear Chair Nelson and Supervisors,

In recent weeks we have participated in public hearings and listened to the perspectives of Supervisors, Chief Wasilewski (Sheriff's Department), other department heads (Probation, Public Defender), racial justice advocates, faith communities and other local organizations. We continue to strongly support the community goals of permanently decreasing our County Jail's long-term Average Daily Population (ADP) and increasing community-based alternative resources. This approach will best ensure a sustainable reduced jail population, improve systemic racial and economic inequities, and reduce recidivism while better securing public safety.

We are encouraged to find solutions which we believe meet the expressed needs of all. The most critical solutions we see are these:

(1) Budget **enough** for alternative community resources for assessment and placement for treatment of addictions and mental illness. This priority was Identified by officers, the Chief, and all community advocates.

(2) Substantially increase holistic advocacy through the Public Defender to identify alternatives to incarceration while addressing underlying social/economic factors that cause justice involvement. CLUE-SB has presented a well-considered specific \$2.43 million budget recommendation in this regard. We urge you to fund those positions for the coming year.

(3) Ask the Sheriff's Department to clarify specific minimum jail staffing standards. Chief Wasilewski has agreed to clarify these standards as applied to the South County jail.

(4) Temporarily pause the current South County jail remodel plan to provide an opportunity for public and expert input to incorporate contemporary designs to improve jail conditions for residents and staff, including direct supervision, and to support goals to divert those with mental health or addiction disabilities to community-based alternatives and reduce ADP.

#### Background:

The Sheriff's presentation on June 1 did not address any ways to reduce the ADP or to reduce the ever-increasing Sheriff Department budget. Instead, the Sheriff reported he expects the ADP to rise as the courts deal with backlogs, and due to decisions out of his control. The Sheriff's budget assumes that the numbers of the incarcerated population will return to pre-pandemic levels.

We are not calling to "defund the police" as the Sheriff claimed at the June 1 hearing. We do ask you to look closely at the Sheriff Department's budget request seeking an increase of nearly \$10 million dollars over the current fiscal year, after also receiving a \$9.7 million increase for 2019-2020.

We request that you, as a Board, take concrete budget-tied steps toward transforming our County's criminal justice system from one that is punitive to one that is restorative and does not perpetuate structural racism. We support changes to the South County Jail complex that can improve the health and safety of custody deputies and jail residents, assess and offer diversion alternatives, and create building blocks toward successful re-entry, all of which will sustain a lower jail ADP and reduce recidivism over the long run.

#### Solutions:

**Our group from the League of Women Voters and CLUE met with Chief Vincent Wasilewski on June 2, and now bring you some recommendations that would not cost the Sheriff any additional funds but would lead to a reduction in the jail population.** Solutions need to come through an on-site remodel/repurposing of the south campus and/or increased funding for off-campus options. Consider the following:

- **Add a sobering center** pre-booking to reduce custody officers and jail beds currently used for 1 day in and out. (In 2019, there were 3,515 one day stays.)
- **Add a holistic assessment team 24/7** to screen pre-booking and divert when possible. This could be staffed from the Public Defender by adding additional holistic advocacy positions to its budget.
- **Add short stay non-jail beds** for mental health or other immediate intake needs
- **Obtain agreement from the Sheriff to pause on the Request for Qualifications (RFQ)** regarding outdated architectural plans for remodeling the main jail. Designate a definite time period and transparent public process for community and expert input for renovation and repurposing of the South County facility.

- **Upgrade Internet and other technology at the jails** for purposes of rehabilitation and education. Participant surveys document the need for access to online programs.
- **Provide access for Freedom to Choose programs in the jail.** Chief Wasilewski welcomes this or other programs that provide emotional support and training for jail residents with no added cost to the Sheriff.

An example and model is San Antonio's Bexar Co Texas program which, over time, has provided treatment and supportive services to 60,000 people who would otherwise have been in jail. (See Santa Barbara Independent, May 13-20, 2021, page12.) In California, Orange County has replicated this model.

As you consider the budget for 2021-2022, we ask you to weave these recommendations into your thinking, discernment and budgeting decisions. If you wish to further discuss this letter, please contact [SocialPolicy@lwvsantabarbara.org](mailto:SocialPolicy@lwvsantabarbara.org)

Sincerely,



Vijaya Jammalamadaka

VJ: M. Earls, S. Horne, G. Osherenko, L. Severance, Ph.D., J.D.