

Sheila de la Guerra

Public Comment - Group 3

#4

From: Laurence Severance <ljseverance@msn.com>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:43 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Laurence Severance public comment on Departmental Agenda Item 4
Attachments: 2025.04.01.Comments.re.jail.expansion.ljs.docx



Caution: This email originated from a source outside of the County of Santa Barbara. Do not click links or open attachments unless you verify the sender and know the content is safe.

Please file the attached as public comment and convey copies to our County Board of Supervisors.

Thank you,
Laurence Severance
(206) 250-5855 (cell)

COMMENTS TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

April 1, 2025

Department Agenda 4 – re: Jail Beds

I am Larry Severance, a Santa Barbara County resident and member of the CLUE-SB/LWW-SB Criminal Justice workgroup that informs my views. However, the public comment offered below is my own.

I want to highlight a path by which you can achieve four goals: (1) Save on huge jail construction costs and long-term operational costs by not building too many jail beds; (2) reliably move toward closure in the Murray case; (3) improve community mental health and well-being; and (4) reduce recidivism.

A focus on jail beds has blinded the County and Sheriff to consider alternatives. In simple terms, let's acknowledge that we have a community mental health/substance use crisis and address those in crisis with a medical model of help, rather than a punitive, jail-based model. Hundreds fewer jail beds may be needed.

Currently around 60% of those in our jails have mental health and/or substance use histories. With our current jail population hovering around 750, that's over 400 people - 400 beds. Many of these are low level, non-violent offenders who could feasibly be supervised by probation and receive care and treatment in our community instead of being warehoused in jail. Jail doesn't improve mental health for anyone. A Task Force could clarify how investing in community-based infrastructure could meet mental health needs in a potentially more cost-effective, humane way, with better outcomes.

During the COVID pandemic "emergency" measures resulted in 37% of those in jail being released back into the community. A year later, a Grand Jury studied what impact that release had on crime. The short answer: no increase. Post-pandemic, our criminal justice system has retreated back from successful emergency measures to again jailing people who don't need to be there to protect public safety. Why? Let's study this.

Potentially, many fewer jail beds are needed if we adopt a hybrid approach: jail for those who are violent and threaten public safety; and offer community-based care and treatment to many of the hundreds who are jailed largely because of mental health challenges. About 90% of those in jail fall below our poverty level and can't afford bail.

A hybrid approach will in all likelihood meet with acceptance by plaintiffs in the Murray case. Let me here paraphrase what plaintiff's counsel wrote to Santa Barbara's County Supervisors in a letter dated May 11, 2023:

..... [T]he Stipulated Judgment specifically calls for consideration of jail population reduction measures.... The County has “agree[d] that population-related stressors pose operational challenges to [the County’s] ability to comply with this Remedial Plan,” [I]f Jail population-related stressors are reduced, particularly as to people with disabilities, [the County] will be better able to ensure implementation of the Remedial Plan.”

Plaintiffs in the Murray case are looking for improved care outcomes, not more jail beds. If you commit to large-scale incarceration as a solution, the Sheriff’s chronic difficulties staffing jail operations **will** increase, leading to predictable shortfalls in care that are likely to send the Murray plaintiffs back to Court.

We can count on jail construction cost-overruns. Sacramento County offers a cautionary warning. There, a similar jail lawsuit was brought on behalf of Sacramento County’s jail residents by the very same plaintiffs’ attorneys as in Murray. Similar inhumane jail conditions were alleged. Sacramento hired Nacht & Lewis, the same contractor this County has hired, was brought in to design an improved jail which Sacramento’s Supervisors approved at a cost of \$1 billion. Later, a peer review of Nacht and Lewis’ design work found about a half dozen ways in which the design would not meet the Court’s remedial requirements.

We’ve got to get this decision right. I join many of those offering public comment in asking you to look beyond jail beds to a comprehensive approach to community mental health infrastructure and resources that will, in the end, reduce our need for jail beds, improve criminal justice, and reduce recidivism.

Appoint a Task Force to examine how we may feasibly lower our jail population through risk-qualified, conditional releases. A Task Force can compare the relative costs of building community-based infrastructure instead of more jail beds, many of which would be filled by low-level offenders in health and/or mental health crises.

THANK YOU.

Laurence Severance, Ph.D., J.D.
Santa Barbara, California

Sheila de la Guerra

From: Lynn Louise Areno <arenolynnlouise@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 7:11 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Public Comment on Departmental Agenda Item #4 for April 1st, 2025

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Subject: Public Comment on Departmental Agenda Item #4 for April 1st 2025

Chair Laura Capps and Members of the Board,

I come from a family of industrious Canadian-Italian immigrants who have been Santa Barbara residents since 1961. We have always been reputable people and respected business owners.

I became a widow in 1994 after the untimely death of my husband and father of five. My youngest is now in his early 30s. He is a very sensitive and kind soul who was deeply scarred by the numerous losses early in life. He suffered from the lack of a father figure and the shattering of our family. He was diagnosed many years ago with complex PTSD and serious depression.

The months he has spent in jail for self-medicating have harmed him and shamed him irreparably. If he had received the proper support and mental health treatment to address the root cause of his issues, it could have broken his currently self-destructive cycle.

The answer is not to expand our jail. It is to create more rehabilitation and mental health treatment opportunities at every level of the continuum of care in our county.

If jails were working to address the core issues of the 60% of the inmates with complex mental health conditions, we would not need to build more jail pods to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Let us pause a moment and remember that our legacy is not something in the future, it is something being shaped right now, with every choice we make and every person we encounter. Our children and following generations need us to create more compassionate and effective alternatives to jails.

Lynn L Areno

Sheila de la Guerra

From: bonesjazzid@gmail.com
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 7:55 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: BOS MEETING 4/1/25 AGENDA ITEM 4: MONEY FOR SECURE LOCKED MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES NOT MORE JAILS

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My family member has been dealing with severe mental health and substance abuse issues for a decade. Prior to the start of his mental illness he was super intelligent, talented, happy, creative, artistic, gregarious, loving, popular, etc. etc. He was a great student right through SBCC with a plan to transfer to university in engineering. Then the mental illness started in his early 20s which is typical.

Since then, despite having numerous 5150s, near death overdoses, trips to the ER, stays in Cottage Hospital psychiatric department, arrests, jail time, and being in the SB County Behavioral Wellness system for the past several years, there has been ZERO TREATMENT AVAILABLE for his mental illness and his condition has only worsened and he is now getting into more and more trouble being homeless on the streets.

This revolving door of law enforcement, 5150, emergency room, jail, back on the streets, overdose, ER, law enforcement, arrest, jail, back on the streets, 5150, etc. etc. has cost the taxpayers of this county and his family countless money with ZERO effective actual treatment for his mental illness and drug abuse that is causing his problems.

He doesn't need jail, he needs a secure locked facility where he can get actual mental health and drug abuse therapy. Mental illness and drug abuse is a medical problem, not a law enforcement problem. Putting these people in jail only makes them worse and then they just release them back on the streets and the cycle repeats itself.

MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT A CRIME BUT ALL SB COUNTY DOES FOR THE MENTALLY ILL IS PUT THEM IN JAIL. STOP PUNISHING THE MENTALLY ILL FOR HAVING A MEDICAL CONDITION. IT IS JUST CRUEL AND HEARTLESS.

The decision for funding for more jails needs to be paused and a task for of community members should study why 60% of SB jail inmates are mentally ill, and then figure out how to fund secure, locked mental health facilities in SB county for these people and get them out of the jails and off the streets.

Mike Glick
Goleta