

Ramirez, Angelica

Public Comment

From: Jeff Chambliss <jeff@chamblisslegal.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 10, 2020 5:07 PM
To: sbcob
Cc: William; Annie Hayes; Tara H. Ford; Catherine Swysen; Stephen Dunkle; Jeff Chambliss
Subject: Comment on Racial Equity and the Criminal Justice System
Attachments: SBD Board Letter.docx

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Clerk of the Board:

Please find attached a letter from the Santa Barbara Defenders for tomorrow's Board Meeting.

Thank you.

J. Jeff Chambliss
President
Santa Barbara Defenders



Santa Barbara Defenders

June 10, 2020

Mr. Gregg Hart
Chairman of the Board of Santa Barbara County Supervisors

Mr. Steven Lavagnino
Supervisor

Ms. Joan Hartmann
Supervisor

Mr. Peter Adam
Supervisor

Mr. Das Williams
Supervisor

Chairman Hart and Supervisors:

My name is Jeff Chambliss and I am the President of Santa Barbara Defenders, a county wide organization of more than 40 local criminal defense practitioners. I am a Past President of the Santa Barbara County Bar Association and I was previously a Chief Trial Deputy for the Santa Barbara County Public Defender's Office. I have been actively practicing criminal defense in this county (North and South) for 30 years.

I write today to propose that you place a moratorium on money spent on additional jail beds and, specifically, to suspend funding the new Jail facility. The \$20 million per year has better uses than doing what we all know and may as well speak honestly about which is to incarcerate more people of color and more African Americans in particular. As you are aware, African Americans make up barely 2% of our population but are nearly 10% of our jail population. This is unacceptable. If we double our jail capacity, we will see a dramatic increase in incarceration at great humanitarian and financial costs to the incarcerated individuals and their families; not to mention the continuing betrayal and erosion of the public's trust in our justice system. Your constituents of all demographics demand bold action.

Please allow me to briefly visit the history of the building of the North County jail and what led to it being funded in the first place. For starters, to the extent that the voters were asked to pay a half cent in additional sales tax to build the jail, they rejected it twice: Measure U in 2000 and Measure S in 2010.

Secondly, to the extent that this body was persuaded to fund the building of the facility, those elements of persuasion are strikingly absent today:

1. There has been a sea change in political will for building new jails and prisons. The era of building new jails and prisons is in the past. There is widespread acknowledgment that warehousing human beings destroys families and ruins lives, lives that matter, lives that can fulfill their potential as human beings only outside of prison walls.
2. Recently, we have seen our existing jail population plummet, down by half, due to Covid and there has been no spike in crime. We couldn't ask for better data on what incarcerating far fewer people looks like. It looks good. The sky is not falling as the result of it.
3. One of the strongest arguments for the new jail – the promise to spend \$2 in community intervention for every dollar spent on incarceration-has fallen by the wayside.

We anticipate the same arguments in favor of the jail (1) violent crime will skyrocket (2) the existing jail is unsafe and (3) that it is somehow now more costly to not fund it than to fund it. We urge you to view these rebuttals skeptically and with an eye toward the potential healing effect of decisive and bold action by this body; not just the same old ways of doing things and the same old way of making decisions. It's time to heal wounds and re-invent criminal justice in a way that provides justice for all. It's time to say to African American community that we hear you loud and clear while not also contributing to their marginalization in painfully obvious ways. Opening the new jail will be a step backward for our County. Deciding to suspend the opening indefinitely will be a courageous act that will be understood for what it is, an intelligent, data-driven rebalancing of the budget priorities called for at this time by the public. We applaud you for your willingness to listen, but it is now time to do more than listen. It is time to act.

J. Jeff Chambliss
President
Santa Barbara Defenders