

Lia Graham

From: Patricia Solorio <psolorio@fundforsantabarbara.org>
Sent: Friday, April 17, 2026 11:51 AM
To: sbcob
Subject: Public Comment for budget hearings re Jail expansion

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Chair and Supervisors.

The Fund for Santa Barbara has long advanced economic, racial, and social justice in our county by addressing the root causes of systemic inequity — not just its symptoms. We are here today to urge you to limit the Northern Branch Jail expansion to one housing unit of 256 beds, and to redirect those savings toward community investments that reflect our county's true values.

Expanding the jail to 384 beds is a choice — and choices have consequences. The data shows that 70% of people in our jails today have not been convicted of anything. They are waiting. They are waiting because our Public Defender is chronically underfunded, creating delays that keep people — **disproportionately people of color and low-income residents** — housed in jail at \$394 per person, per day. Building more capacity does not solve this. It entrenches it.

The READY program at the Northern Branch Jail has already demonstrated that early legal representation reduces average jail stays by 48%. Evidence from comparable counties confirms that addressing case processing delays can meaningfully reduce the average daily jail population. These are proven, cost-effective strategies. They are also the just ones.

We are also concerned about the equity implications of our county's arrest rate, which is 33% higher than the statewide average. Low-level arrests disrupt jobs, housing, and families — and they do so unevenly. This board has the authority to ask hard questions about those policies.

The up to \$147 million in long-term savings from limiting jail expansion to one housing unit could instead strengthen community-based mental health and substance use treatment, fund early legal representation, and support the essential services our neighbors depend on.

We ask this Board to exercise the prudent, courageous stewardship our community deserves: limit the jail expansion to one housing unit, **invest in people**, and help build a Santa Barbara County where power and resources are distributed equitably, and where justice is not rationed by zip code or the size of one's bank account.

Thank you.

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