

de la Guerra, Sheila

Public Comment



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From: Pamela Flynt Tambo <pambotambo@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 15, 2023 10:36 AM
To: sbcob; Supervisor Das Williams; Laura Capps; Hartmann, Joan; Bob Nelson; Lavagnino, Steve
Cc: Miyasato, Mona; Tanja Heitman; Macuga, Tracy; sheriff@sbsheriff.org
Subject: Letter for May 16 BOS Agenda Item D-7-#23-00492
Attachments: LWVSB Final BOS Jail - 23-0516.pdf

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Attached is a letter from the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara regarding Item D-7 for tomorrow's Board of Supervisors meeting.

Thank you for distributing it.

Best,
Pam Flynt Tambo

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Mental illness is at once the most solitary of afflictions for those experiencing it and the most social of maladies for everyone around them.

Quoted by Andrew Scull, M.D.



May 15, 2023

Chair Das Williams and County Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara

RE: Board of Supervisors Meeting on May 16, 2023, Item D-7 23-00492

Dear Chairman Williams and County Supervisors:

The League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara has been studying the issues about criminal justice reform for several years at the national and state levels as well as locally. Here in Santa Barbara County we have looked at additional issues because of the Murray v. County of Santa Barbara lawsuit. We have been able to meet several times with attorneys involved in that case. We have had numerous meetings with our county's Public Safety Department Directors and staff members as well as numerous other county staff members. We have toured both County jails.

Our League develops positions for program action which include both Behavioral Health and Corrections System which relate to the jail renovation project before the board on Tuesday May 16.

Our local League's position regarding the Corrections System states:

"Support of a corrections system which has as its primary goal rehabilitation, that is, the prevention of recidivism, with emphasis on alternatives to incarceration, and on compliance with state standards for facilities and staffing. Support of programs and public education to involve the community in rehabilitation."

Additionally, we have worked closely with CLUE-SB participating in a joint workgroup to study our criminal justice system and make recommendations to our county government.

We have reviewed the recommended actions provided by the County Executive Officer and General Services Director for your May 16 Board meeting. We concur in recommendation b) to proceed with a minimized renovation plan that addresses the Inmate Reception Center (IRC), makes Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, and eliminates use of all but 128 beds at the main jail as detailed in the report. We understand that the beds that would remain at the South Branch Jail (SBJ) would not be used for any individual's long term stay. We also support recommendations in c)(1) to proceed with designs of one new pod at the North Branch Jail (NBJ) location for a total jail system of 728 rated beds (an achievable reduction for the 759 April average of beds in use in both jails). And, we support the following:

- Space at the Main Jail must also include private and secure accommodation for Early Representation before arraignment. In order to reduce the number of people in the jail, the public defenders need to be able to meet in person with their clients in a room designed to honor confidentiality and allow for meaningful conversations. We cannot tell from the diagrams presented to date if the new IRC will accommodate Early Representation.
- Both jails need an effective intake process that diverts or releases those who do not present a risk to the community. Space for the Intake Coordination Team will be needed to support individuals' access to release on their own recognizance when deemed safe, placement in a hospital, crisis stabilization, sobering center or other facility in the community when appropriate, electronic monitoring, and community treatment for persons with behavioral wellness concerns.
- It is critically important to address the needs of persons with mental illness (behavioral wellness concerns) with care and support in the community as much as possible, rather than being held in the jails.
- Design and construction of renovations and operation of the jails must comply with the stipulated agreement in the Murray case. The County not only must meet the needs of the disabled population and those with medical and mental health needs, but also must reduce the harmful impacts on all the residents who need to have easy access to time in the

exercise yard, timely and private meetings with medical and mental health staff, and be treated with respect for their humanity.

We understand that currently at least one-third of the people in our jails have a behavioral wellness or mental health diagnosis. These people are nearly always traumatized when held in jail. By reducing the space and the costs of staffing a large jail population the savings can be used to provide community-based services for these people. This will help them cope with their illnesses and prevent further deterioration of their mental health.

We believe you should support Option 1 because of these indicators:

- Crime trends are down, according to current data released by the Sheriff's Department;
- Most people (about 70%) in our County jails are not yet tried nor convicted and may have their cases resolved as a misdemeanor with minimal jail time;
- Staffing the jails has proven difficult. We should not overbuild and burden the county with unsustainable and unnecessary costs to service the debt;
- There are more acceptable ways available now to address rehabilitation with community services rather than punishment in the jails;
- In the North County we can add additional pods if needed later due to an increase in our county's population or an increase in crime rates;
- We need to prioritize addressing concerns with the Stipulated Judgment in the Murray Case which continues to cost the County for the Federal Court's oversight as well as provide better living conditions for anyone housed even a short while in the Main Jail.

Thank you for your continued attention to the public safety needs of our community, especially as it relates to our community's jails and related services. We urge your support of

“Option 1 (new construction of one pod for a total jail system of 728 beds) and prior to final design, return to the Board with targeted diversion strategies to address jail population management, sustainable jail staffing, and identified savings or other revenues to fund the strategies,...”

We look forward to further opportunities to address the planning and progress of this complicated and challenging renovation project at the SBJ and probable construction at the NBJ

Sincerely,

Vicki Allen
VP Communication

Pam Flynt Tambo
VP Social Policy

Gail Osherenko
Chair, Criminal Justice Task Force