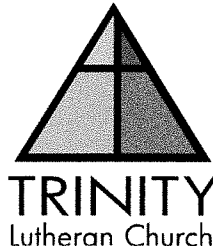


Public Comment



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909 N. La Cumbre Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93110
office@telcsb.org ~ 805.687.1577

SANTA BARBARA
COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

May 12, 2023

Dear Santa Barbara County Supervisors:

Trinity Lutheran Church of Santa Barbara, through its church Council, supports a position endorsed by CLUE-Santa Barbara (Clergy and Laity United for Economic justice for providing humane jail conditions and a reduced jail size. The evidence and research CLUE has assembled shows how we can safely reduce our long-term jail population by not jailing non-violent persons accused of minor offenses who do not need to be there to protect public safety.

It is our understanding County Supervisors will decide among three options to address inhumane conditions in Santa Barbara's South County jail. The impetus for this is a federal Court mandates in the Murray lawsuit brought on behalf of jail residents against the County and County Sheriff. As a faith community that supports the work of CLUE-Santa Barbara, we support funding for "Option 1" as the most humane and financially viable. This option will meet projected needs as we increase community-based alternatives that are a surer way to secure long-term public safety. Especially for those in jail whose principal problems are mental health or addiction, community-based treatment is preferred over jail. **We endorse and ask that you vote for "Option 1", to:**

**Add one housing pod to the North County Jail (not to exceed 256 new beds);
Retain/remodel 128 beds in the South County jail's Intake/Reception Center (RIC)
for A.D.A. compliance; cease using other beds;
Develop strategies and funding for jail population management, including diversion
and other community-based alternatives.**

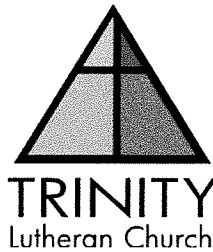
Considering the 376 beds already available in the North County jail, we support CLUE's findings. "Option 1" is most cost-effective because its scope will not result in overbuilding. Also, construction of a single pod can be expedited because ground infrastructure is already in place. This choice will secure public safety with new humane housing, is financially prudent, and more likely to be adequately staffed.

Additional reasons why we ask you to vote for "Option 1":

- 1) Crime trends are down. Recent data released by the Sheriff's Department shows a downward trend in crime statistics for Santa Barbara County;
- 2) For many of those charged with non-violent misdemeanors or felonies, diversion, probation and community supervision are viable alternatives. About 70% of those currently in our County jails are neither tried, nor convicted; 65% are accused of felonies, but accused felonies are not proven felonies. For many accused of non-violent crimes, charges will be reduced through plea bargaining and resolve as misdemeanors with minimal jail time.



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- 3) An estimated 30% or more of those currently held in jail suffer mental health challenges. Research shows that jail worsens mental health symptoms and provides no cure. For non-violent low level offenders, community-based treatment is a better use of public funds instead of jail cells, and will result in better outcomes.
- 4) Early Representation by the Public Defender, including holistic advocacy, will help reduce the number of people in jail who do not need to be there to protect the public. Our District Attorneys' diversion programs will also help.
- 5) The Sheriff's Department is unable to hire sufficient staff to meet current needs. Mandatory overtime for custodial staff and workforce housing shortages in South County, are serious practical and financial barriers to maintaining a large jail population. Our County can use funds more wisely than to build and maintain unnecessary jail capacity. Safely reducing the jail population is a practical and pragmatic long-term solution.
- 6) Plans for jail beds can always expand if actually needed in the future for reasons that defy current expert projections.
- 7) The option we support is a viable basis to comply with the Stipulated Judgment in Murray. Ongoing federal Court oversight is at the County's expense. The sooner solutions are in place to address inhumane conditions in the South County jail, the better for jail residents and staff. The option we endorse can likely be implemented sooner than other options, resulting in litigation cost-savings for our County.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Perez, Council President
Trinity Lutheran Church of Santa Barbara

Acknowledged and agreed:

Pastor Mark Marius



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