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May 22, 2016

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA  
CLERK OF THE  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

County of Santa Barbara  
123 East Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Subject: North County Jail Bids

Honorable Supervisors,

If Sheriff Brown believes, as he has stated in a recently published opinion piece, that "rehabilitation is truly the core mission of all correctional facilities", why have inmates with disabilities in our jail been allowed to suffer the kinds of neglect detailed in the report issued last February by Disabilities Rights California? The report found that inmates with mental health conditions housed in our Santa Barbara County Jail were subjected to undue and excessive isolation and solitary confinement, inadequate mental health care, lack of treatment when held on a psychiatric hold, and denial of their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. These findings are, unfortunately, consistent with what our families have reported.

Surely, this indictment cannot be blamed entirely on the design or the condition of the building that houses our existing jail! Jails are not designed for treatment and most jail personnel were not trained to provide treatment and rehabilitation. Conditions in our jail have recently begun to change, but only after serious cases of neglect and abuse of power were documented and reported by detainees and family members.

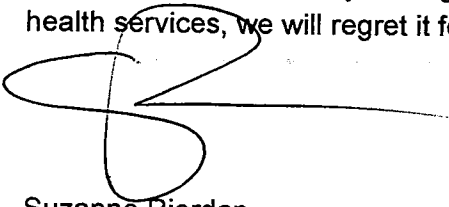
The Disabilities Right Report noted that 73% of our inmates are being held before their sentencing, which is significantly above the average of other California Counties. If even half of those pretrial detainees awaited their hearing outside the jail, how many jail beds would no longer be needed and how many millions of dollars would the county be able to save?

In considering the dilemma of where to find at minimum \$14.75 Million in county funds to cover the cost of building a new North County Jail, we urge you to consider questions that our society has been grappling with for over a century. Dorothea Dix, in the 1800's, led an initiative to treat people with severe mental health disorders in hospitals rather than jails and prisons. Should mentally ill people be held by armed guards in locked jails designed to punish and contain criminals, or treated in facilities dedicated to healing? The stark difference between the two options is illustrated for us daily by the experience of family members who seek to visit and comfort their loved ones.

During a time when our mental health department is considerably underfunded in comparison to other counties and treatment facilities for people with mental health disorders and complex needs were desperately lacking, you set aside \$14M to cover only the first year of the operation of a new North County jail. How many treatment beds in a state-of-the art facility could we have created with this kind of money? If these funds were used to modernize the existing jail and an equal sum set aside toward addressing an urgent need for treatment facilities in a non-punitive, community setting, it would go a long way towards correcting a gaping hole in our continuum of care. It would redress a serious imbalance in our county's priorities.

Families ACT! urges you NOT to build a North County jail which would commit the County to 30 years of operations cost for not one, but two jails. Instead, rehab the existing jail and consider setting aside funds for the creation of residential treatment and supported housing beds for the population that has been cycling in and out of our jail at an untenable cost to our community. In truth, we need treatment beds in the community, as well as a modernized but appropriately - scaled jail.

If we set aside funds for long-needed therapeutic residential communities and provide appropriate treatment options closer to the onset of someone's illness, many persons with mental health conditions will not end up in the jail at all. If our county makes judicious choices at this critical juncture in our history, we can afford both treatment beds and jail cells. If we commit to a project that will stress the county's budget allocations and forego much needed expansion in our mental health services, we will regret it for an entire generation.



Suzanne Riordan  
Executive Director  
Families ACT!