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Katherine Douglas *Public Comment, Special Issue: Jail System Housing*

From: eob <eonjabl@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 14, 2026 6:28 AM
To: sbcob
Subject: Public Comment - Budget Special Issue: Jail System Housing Options
Attachments: Public Comment - Budget Special Issue: Jail System Housing Options

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April 13, 2026

E. onja Brown Lawson
1233 Alta Vista Rd. Apt 7
Santa Barbara, CA 93103

Dear Supervisors:

The Board's decision regarding whether to pursue a 1.5 jail expansion (384 beds) or the 1.0 option (256 beds) must be grounded in a clear budget strategy—one that reflects responsible stewardship today while ensuring a resilient and sustainable future.

As you revisit this decision, we urge you to rely on the updated analysis developed since the April 2025 vote. As Supervisor Laura Capps has noted, we now have more precise and relevant data to guide this choice. This is not merely a facilities decision—it is a defining moment that will determine whether we reduce harm and improve outcomes, or continue costly inefficiencies that burden vulnerable populations and divert resources from essential community services.

Current data clearly demonstrates that the 1.0 option meets projected need. By contrast, the 1.5 option would create excess capacity and result in approximately \$147 million in unnecessary county expenditures over the next 20 years. The Sheriff's February 2026 data shows an Average Daily Population (ADP) of approximately 765—already near the 1.0 capacity level and well below the 876 capacity under the 1.5 option. With modest and achievable reductions, ADP is projected to decline further to approximately 730.

Importantly, our County Executive Officer has identified promising results from current criminal justice improvements. These findings make clear that immediate reductions are achievable without new construction. Current jail population levels are driven by system gaps—not a shortage of beds. For example, individuals awaiting mental health or substance use disorder placements remain in custody unnecessarily, despite new treatment capacity coming online. These near-term changes alone could reduce ADP to approximately 700—well within the 1.0 capacity.

Population projections also do not justify the 1.5 expansion. Estimates projecting growth to approximately 810 individuals over the next decade rely on outdated assumptions that fail to account for already funded and implemented reforms. In addition, short-term population surges can be effectively managed through coordinated system strategies, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 period and recent large-scale community events, without the need for permanent expansion.

There are also clear, actionable strategies that can further reduce jail population. Expanding early Public Defender access and reducing court delays have been shown to significantly decrease length of stay—the primary driver of jail population. Even a modest 10% reduction in case processing time could reduce ADP by approximately 75 individuals.

Additionally, Santa Barbara County's higher-than-average misdemeanor arrest rate contributes to unnecessary jail use. A significant percentage of these arrests are ultimately declined for filing, yet they still result in jail bookings that increase ADP without improving public safety. This is a correctable issue that should be addressed through policy reform rather than expanded incarceration capacity.

At the heart of this decision is the human impact. Individuals remain in custody longer due to systemic delays—not increased risk. People with mental illness wait in jail for treatment that has already been ordered. Low-level arrests

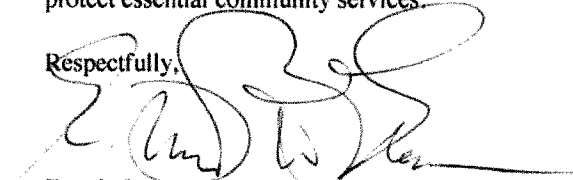
disrupt employment, housing, and family stability. Expanding to the 1.5 option would divert critical resources away from the very services proven to reduce harm and improve outcomes.

The financial implications are equally significant. The additional 128 beds under the 1.5 option would cost over \$147 million over 20 years, at a time when the County is already facing a projected budget reduction of \$48.7 million and the elimination of 447 positions—primarily in public health and social services. Responsible governance requires prioritizing investments in community-based solutions, staffing, and proven population reduction strategies.

The evidence is clear: the 1.0 option aligns with current data, projected needs, and fiscally responsible governance. The 1.5 option represents unnecessary expansion at substantial cost, while perpetuating inefficiencies and avoidable harm.

We respectfully urge you to choose the 1.0 option and invest in strategies that promote justice, reduce harm, and protect essential community services.

Respectfully,



E. onja Brown Lawson, Member,
Board of Directors
Families ACT

Beds NOT cells!

Katherine Douglas

From: Debbie Allen <debbieinsb@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 14, 2026 2:59 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Public Comment - Budget Special Issue: Jail System Housing Options

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Dear SBC BOS

I am opposed to jail expansion beyond the 1 Pod already approved for Santa Maria.

I am Deborah Allen, on the board of FamiliesAct! I am also a member of NAMI and a LCSW clinician and adjunct faculty. I am not retired so I am unable to attend your meeting but hope my letter will be impactful.

I have watched my veteran brother-in-law recycle from jail to homelessness over the last 40 years. The taxpayer cost for jail time, court, DA, PD, probation and Cottage ER is probably in the range of hundreds of thousands. The lack of mental health services and disconnect between treatment providers has diminished his ability to succeed and convinced him that he is a hopeless case.

In the last 10 years, his son has suffered from the same inherited mental illness and has done the same cycle in and out of court, jail and homelessness. This problem is generational! The jail has not rehabilitated either one nor taught them any lessons about breaking the law. When they break the law, there is no criminal intent. Breaking the law, in their cases, is always paired with a flare up of their brain disease that causes a lack of impulse control, psychosis, and a deranged presentation in the community. Having more jail pods will not help the estimated 30 percent of the jail population with serious mental illness.

The \$147M could be used to develop supportive housing, board and care facilities, and crisis residential services that are sadly lacking in our county rather than funding more jail cells. It could also be used to reduce the caseload of public defenders who are already overburdened.

I will briefly describe a recent story of my nephew:

I called 911 requesting mental health and police assistance. Rather than sending a co-response team, 2 officers arrived. When they stopped him to question him, he ran away and one of the officers chased him into a neighborhood. When she cornered him in a backyard, he lunged at her creating a dangerous situation for both of them. He went back and forth from jail to court and accepted a plea deal and diversion. He was told he was on his last chance (due to previous charges). He successfully completed Santa Marias Good Samaritan Detox residential treatment. He then went into sober living with no enhanced case manager from CenCal and was refused services by BWell. He was running out of money and managed to find a job. He was waiting for 3 months for a BWell reassessment when he relapsed. He really needed an Assertive Community Treatment model or what our county calls FSP. Not one provider ever thought to interview a family member. I could have provided documentation that showed a forensic psychological assessment diagnosing Schizoaffective disorder. I tried contacting BWell but they said there was nothing they could do and he'd have to wait. Well, while he

was waiting, he became homeless and missed his court date. He is now sitting in prison. That's what happens when we lack a coordinated and comprehensive system of care!

Thank you for taking time to hear our families story.

Deborah Allen, LCSW and family member