

Gail Osherenko – Public Comment 2.28.2023 to Board of Supervisors

Chair Williams and Board Members,

First I want to say how much our joint LWW/CLUE work group on criminal justice appreciates the Board's attention to ways to reduce the jail population without compromising public safety.

Over a third of those in our County's 2 jails are charged with low-level misdemeanor offenses. Many are "familiar faces" who cycle in and out of jail. They need mental health treatment and/or addiction treatment that is not available in the jails but should be available in the community. We hope that the Board will allocate substantial funds in your next budget to increase services in the community.

We also hope that the Public Defender's application for a pilot program for Early Representation will receive grant funding, but if it does not that you will approve funding for it. The program would ensure that the lawyers for indigent clients, have an opportunity to meet and work with their clients days, not just minutes, before arraignments. This is so important because the PD can link their clients to housing and services they need to stay out of jail and be ready to reassure the arraignment judges that some clients may be safely released pending resolution of their cases.

Our letter to you also asks for **live data tracking of beds and services** for mental health and addiction treatment that law enforcement, probation, social service agencies, and co-response teams can use to identify available alternatives to jail.

Finally, We hope you will ask our new District Attorney to promptly share with the Public Defender all the evidence available from the Sheriff or investigators as soon as it is available. People should not be left in the dark about the basis of charges against them. This goes to openness, transparency, fairness and equity – values that are vital to the League of Women Voters.

Thank you again for all the work you and so many County employees are doing to make our criminal justice system more humane.