

Alameda County Sheriff's Office
Alameda County District Attorney's Office
Alameda County Probation Department
Alameda County Superior Court
Alameda County Board of Supervisors
Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Northern California

Sent via email

March 17, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

For decades people who are currently or formerly incarcerated have led the fight to end mass criminalization, incarceration, and state surveillance in the United States. All along, they have been shining a spotlight on the harmful, dehumanizing, and unsanitary conditions of confinement in jails, prisons, and detention centers. At the same time, they have rightly questioned why we as a society continue to use punitive responses to issues that are largely social, political, or economic in nature.

Alameda County has been no exception. For years incarcerated Alameda County residents and their loved ones have risen up to share testimony and reject the horrid conditions inside our county jails. The county has been sued numerous times for jail-based health abuses for everything from lack of access to reproductive health services to wrongful deaths. Santa Rita Jail (and Glenn Dyer Jail before it closed) has never been a safe or healthy place for our beloved community members. Multiple coalitions, campaigns, work stoppages, and hunger strikes inside Santa Rita Jail have highlighted these efforts.

“Conditions inside Santa Rita are at a ‘crisis point.’ Detainees are only provided cleaning supplies once a week...[and] are contracting lice, bed bugs, and flesh-eating staph infections from the MRSA virus... Jail staff routinely neglects medical and mental health emergencies.”

- Santa Rita Jail strike demand letter, October 29, 2019

Indeed, growing public health research on the harms of incarceration has repeatedly affirmed what frontline communities have said all along:

- [Incarceration measurably harms one's mental and physical health.](#)
- [Incarceration negatively impacts one's family and community health.](#)
- [The criminal legal system disproportionately harms people who are structurally marginalized](#), including Black people, Latinx people, Native American people, immigrants, people with disabilities, queer and transgender people, and people with low incomes.

The fact that incarceration is harmful to the health of everyone in jails, prisons, or detention centers did not begin nor will it end with the novel coronavirus. This includes people who are currently incarcerated, people who were formerly incarcerated, their loved ones, and the people who work in these facilities. The novel coronavirus pandemic adds a concentrated urgency to this reality and foregrounds important truths.

This pandemic reminds us that we are all only as safe and healthy as the most vulnerable and under-resourced among us.

This pandemic reminds us that overcrowded spaces — such as jails, prisons, and detention centers — are, at best, precarious environments for our health.

This pandemic reminds us that we have failed to create a functional social safety net — including health care, housing, and paid leave — in this county and beyond.

These are important reminders that demand immediate action, in order to keep us safe from COVID-19 and to build the healthy communities we seek beyond this pandemic. We believe our actions must also center people who face incarceration.

Thus, we continue to urge Alameda County officials to meet the following demands:

- 1. Alameda County must stop incarcerating people.** No new people should enter Santa Rita Jail. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Ending Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention/custody, implementing zero transfers to ICE, and ending any collusion with ICE to arrest community members
 - b. Ending the criminalization of unhoused people, including police sweeps of unsheltered people and people living in vacant units
 - c. Ending crimeless revocations
 - d. Ending money bail and pretrial incarceration in favor of the presumption of release
 - e. Supporting decriminalization efforts, including of sex work

- 2. Alameda County must decarcerate Santa Rita Jail.** It is unsafe to be inside jails right now. This is especially true in Santa Rita Jail where the Alameda County Sheriff's Office has a track record of creating untenable conditions for the jail population. The consequence of county inaction will be death. We expect releases¹ to happen in waves; thus steps to decarceration include but are not limited to:
 - a. Prioritizing immediate release of those who are most directly vulnerable to COVID-19, including adults over the age of 50 (as called for by the Alameda County Public Defender), pregnant people, immunosuppressed people, and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses

¹ By *release*, we mean releasing people back into the community if they have a temperature of 99.9f or below. If they have positive symptoms for COVID-19 at the time of release, they should be sent to a nearby community healthcare facility that has the capacity to provide appropriate treatment. Transferring people to another jail is not an acceptable term of release. Upon release, people should be guaranteed immediate access to quality health care, housing, and other basic necessities as needed. Housing may include county provision of hotel rooms.

- b. Releasing those who are primary caregivers for anyone who falls in the above categories
- c. Releasing those who are incarcerated pretrial
- d. Releasing those who are incarcerated on low-level offenses, including charges or convictions due to mental health or substance abuse needs
- e. Releasing those with a scheduled 2020 or 2021 calendar year release date
- f. Releasing all persons incarcerated in Santa Rita Jail by March 31, 2020

3. Alameda County must meet the immediate needs of people who are incarcerated. There is no way to be inside Santa Rita Jail safely. Governor Newsom and state public health officials have issued an executive order stating that there should be no gatherings of over 250 people and that smaller gatherings should give at least 6 feet of space between individuals. While this is impossible for people who remain inside Santa Rita Jail, that is no excuse to allow health abuses to continue. While we actively decarcerate, we must ensure that those who are still inside get their health needs met and are able to stay fully connected to their social support network. At a minimum, action steps include but are not limited to:

- a. Ensuring proper access to hygiene materials, including soap, sanitizing wipes, and high-alcohol hand sanitizer
- b. Ensuring thorough and regular cleaning of the premises
- c. Eliminating fees for phone calls
- d. Ensuring that state law requiring no jail copays for medical or dental visits is being fully implemented
- e. Barring the use of lockdowns, administrative segregation, or solitary confinement
- f. Ensuring proper access to health care, including COVID-19 testing and mental health services
- g. Ensuring access to nutritious food and drinks
- h. Protecting people's ability to sleep and rest to the full extent necessary

4. Alameda County must invest in the assets that make our communities healthy. As we divest from jails, prisons, detention centers, and policing, we must invest in health-affirming resources, such as robust health care, affordable housing, living wages, quality schools, environmental justice, and adequate transportation. Examples of the types of policies that our community seeks include but are not limited to:

- a. Ending evictions ordered by the Court or carried out by the Sheriff's Office
- b. Improving fair chance hiring and retention policies to ensure formerly incarcerated people can access quality career, job, and apprenticeship opportunities without the threat of discrimination
- c. Ending the presence of Sheriff's Office personnel on public school grounds, including community college campuses and high schools
- d. Reducing significantly the presence of armed Sheriff's Office deputies in public spaces, including parks and youth centers
- e. Instituting a moratorium on housing exclusions against people with criminal records

Now is not the time for political fights. This moment calls for bold strides to ensure families are able to protect themselves from both COVID-19 and state violence. It is the time for action.

We expect you to release a comprehensive county plan of action by Wednesday, March 18, 2020 at 9:00 am PST with a public report on progress by Friday, March 20, 2020 and every subsequent Monday until the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted federally, statewide, and in our county.

Sincerely,

Human Impact Partners (HIP)

In partnership with:

Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus
Alameda County Immigration Legal and Education Partnership
All of us or none
Anti Police-Terror Project
Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC)
Audit Ahern Coalition
Bay Area Resource Generation
Bay Resistance
Bay Rising
Blue Heart
CA Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance
Catalyst Project
Causa Justa:: Just Cause
Centro Legal de La Raza
Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
Critical Resistance Oakland
Do No Harm Coalition
Dolores Street Community Services
East Bay Community Law Center
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Freedom for Immigrants
Genesis
Health Justice Commons
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Just Cities
Justice Reinvestment Coalition of Alameda County
Justice Team First Unitarian Church of Oakland
Justice Teams Network
Legal Aid at Work
LIFT Economy
Medicine for Migration at UCSF
Mujeres Unidas y Activas
Oakland Rising

Pangea Legal Services
Public Health Justice Collective
Restore Oakland
San Francisco Rapid Response Network
San Francisco Rising
SURJ Bay Area
Transitions Clinic Network
Urban Peace Movement
Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club