

UPDATE: Emergency Release of Prisoners from Santa Rita Jail

Friday, March 20, 2020

Thank you so much to everyone who made calls on Wednesday! Just two days after prisoners delivered their powerful, collectively-written grievance to the Board of Supervisors, Sheriff Ahern has announced that **314 people will be released from Santa Rita.**



Jail support currently on site for releases outside Santa Rita, 1pm Friday March 20, 2020

While NBC news reports that Ahern's action was "at the request of Alameda County Presiding Judge Tara Desautels, Public Defender Brendon Woods and District Attorney Nancy O'Malley," we know from experience that public pressure *is* critical and impactful. After the November workers' strike and phone zap against forced labor, the jail quietly changed its policy on kitchen workers to a volunteer-based system.

However, we also believe that people in Santa Rita deserve a much more comprehensive and health-conscious response! Today's release represents **only about 12 percent of the jail population** and does not prioritize people who are at **high risk of serious illness or death** if they are infected, such as older and immunocompromised persons.

Santa Rita is a dangerous and unsanitary facility. Many people who are released are sick, injured, and malnourished. Essentially, they will be exiting one public health crisis only to enter another. **People should not only be released, but released safely.** Santa Rita should provide releasees with masks, as well as money for transportation: the usual \$5 BART card is insufficient for travel to many places in the Bay Area. This will result in vulnerable people lingering in public places where they are vulnerable to infection or to infecting others.

Even as people are released, it is critical to maintain pressure on the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and Board of Supervisors. Please consider circulating our [Santa Rita Bulletin \[pdf\]](#) and prisoners' [collective grievance \(scroll down several pages\)](#) with your networks. Sheriff Ahern has the power to safely release vulnerable people in custody. If he is unable to do so, his dangerous jail – which continues to operate on slave labor at the public's expense – should be closed.