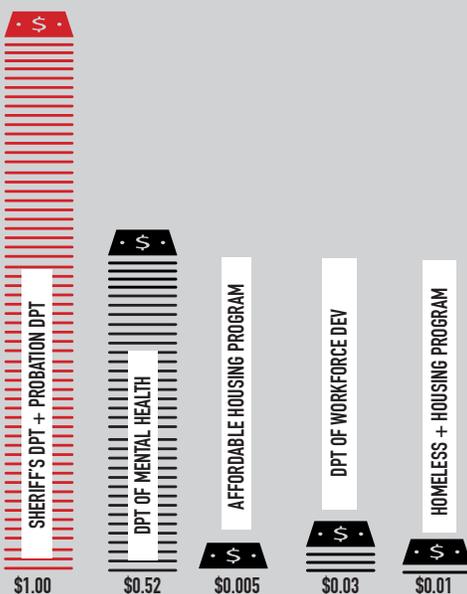


# RECLAIM, REIMAGINE AND REINVEST

## AN ANALYSIS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S CRIMINALIZATION BUDGET

### THE L.A. COUNTY BUDGET: DOLLARS TO CENTS



SOURCE: RECOMMENDED LA COUNTY BUDGET, 2017-2018 ▼

- For every dollar allocated to the combined Sheriff's Department and Probation Department budgets, the Affordable Housing Program, which provides funding for the development and preservation of affordable housing, receives less than one cent.
- The Department of Mental Health receives 52 cents for every dollar allocated to the combined Sheriff's Department and Probation Department budgets, the Homeless and Housing Program receives one cent and the Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services receives three cents.

For too long, Los Angeles County ("the County") has viewed public safety exclusively through a policing and incarceration lens and poured billions of limited public resources into failing solutions. Over the past 20 years, the County has dramatically increased the budgets of its Sheriff's Department and Probation Department. These decisions were made despite evidence that policing and incarceration do not significantly impact crime rates<sup>1</sup> and a mandate from the majority of Californians to decrease reliance on incarceration and punitive responses to public health and safety issues.<sup>2</sup>

The County has not adequately invested in the community-based infrastructure that is required to holistically address the root causes and symptoms of crime and violence. Instead of sufficiently funding youth and community development, creating employment opportunities, addressing homelessness, treating mental health issues, or providing treatment for drug dependency, the County continues to flood resources to the Sheriff's Department

and Probation Department, which have long histories of abuse, ongoing issues of brutality and a lack of transparency and accountability.<sup>3</sup>

Today, in addition to the billions of dollars the County spends on the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department annually, the County plans to dedicate at least an additional \$2.3 billion to the construction of two entirely new jails.<sup>4</sup> Strikingly, \$2.3 billion is seen as a conservative estimate of the total cost.<sup>5</sup> With the repayment of bonds, expenditures could total \$3.5 billion or more.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, the County contracted with a private firm to develop a comprehensive jail expansion plan. Yet the County continues to proceed with its jail expansion plan without reassessing need, ignoring recent shifts by the state to move away from carceral solutions and towards justice reinvestment.<sup>7</sup>

This budget brief details the historical, current, and proposed investments in criminalization and incarceration by L.A. County. It then highlights alternative investments in community-based public safety solutions that would provide sustainable development for residents, while simultaneously addressing the root causes of health and safety inequities in the County.

## What keeps us safe?

Jails are not the solution to addressing communities' health and economic challenges.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, they make them worse. Studies show that jails are not conducive to providing appropriate mental health treatment.<sup>9</sup> Spending time in jail exacerbates mental illness,<sup>10</sup> fails to reduce dependency on drugs,<sup>11</sup> and results in long-term financial instability.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, no conclusive findings exist that demonstrate increased incarceration has a meaningful impact on reducing crime.<sup>13</sup> Instead, study after study shows that a living wage, access to holistic health services and treatment, educational opportunity, and stable housing are far more successful in reducing crime than police or prisons.<sup>14</sup>

## Budget Breakdown

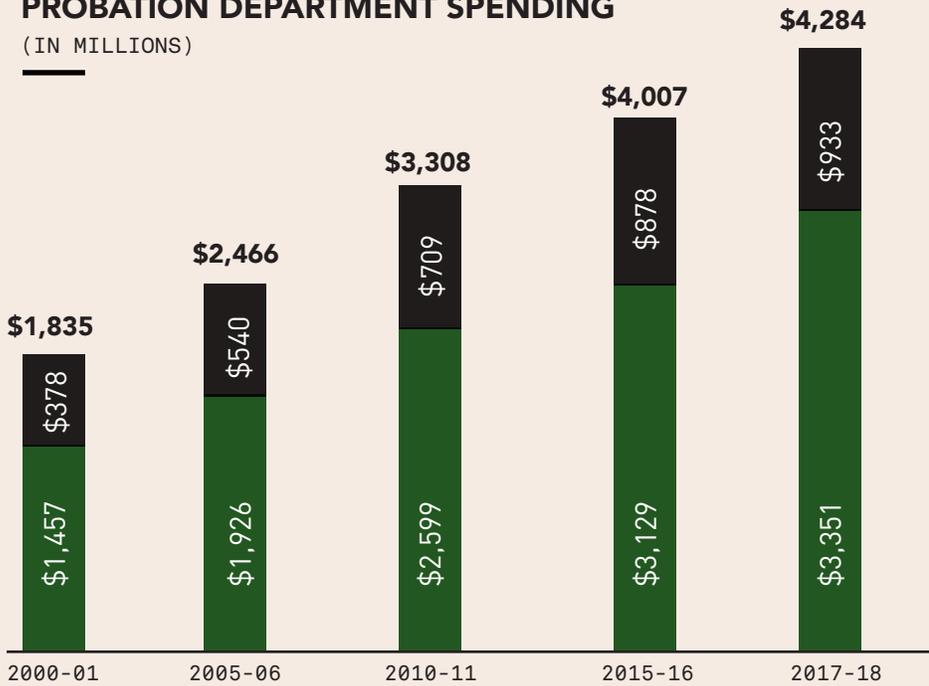
Despite the evidence that incarceration does not actually keep communities safe, L.A. County allocates a large proportion of

its annual budget to the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department (\$4.28 billion, or 14.3 percent of total expenditures, in the 2017-2018 recommended budget), while underfunding many of the critical resources needed to keep communities truly safe. For example, the Department of Mental Health was allocated \$2.2 billion in the 2017-2018 recommended budget—or 52 cents for every dollar spent on the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department. Since 2000, the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department budgets have grown by a combined \$2.4 billion, and budgeted positions for these departments have increased by nearly 5,800 positions.

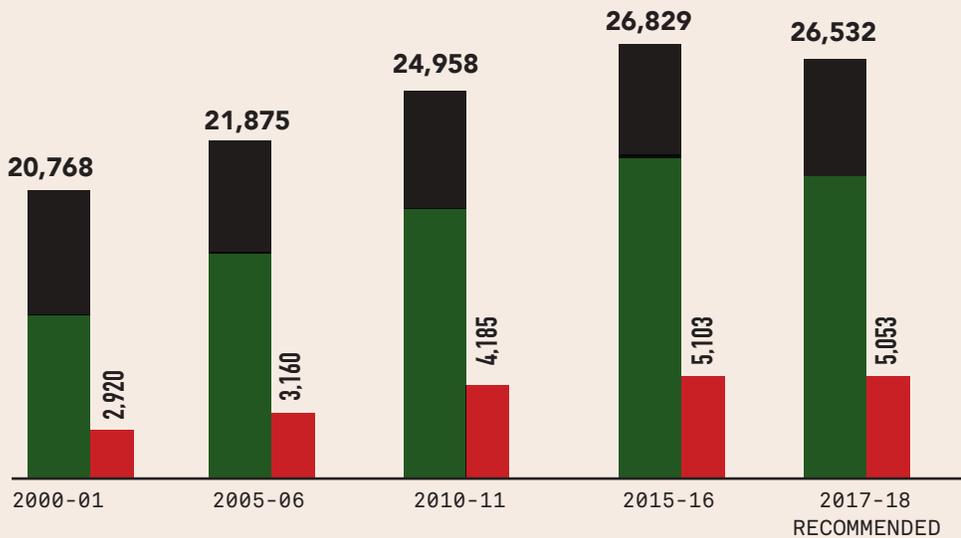
The California Budget and Policy Center reports that in fiscal year 2015-2016, the County dedicated more than 15.6 percent of its budget to incarceration and responses to crime, which are defined as adult and juvenile detention, jail facilities, district attorney prosecution, probation, public defenders, certain trial court activities, grand juries, juvenile wards of the court, and related capital outlay.<sup>15</sup>

## SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT AND PROBATION DEPARTMENT SPENDING

(IN MILLIONS)



## BUDGETED POSITIONS: SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT AND PROBATION DEPARTMENT -VS- MENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT



### 2017-2018 Recommended Budget

**Sheriff's Dept + Probation Dept:** \$4.28 billion  
**Department of Mental Health:** \$2.22 billion  
**Affordable Housing Program:** \$20.4 million  
**Homeless and Housing Programs:** \$60.2 million  
**Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Service:** \$109.8 million

SOURCE: L.A. COUNTY BUDGET DOCUMENTS, 2000-2001 TO 2017-2018

- Since 2000, combined allocations to the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department have increased by \$2.4 billion. Sheriff's Department allocations have increased by \$1.9 billion and Probation Department allocations have increased by \$555 million.

- Since 2000, combined allocations to the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department have increased as a proportion of the total budget, from 11.8 percent in 2000-2011, to 14.3 percent in the 2017-2018 recommended budget.

- Since 2000, combined allocations to the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department increased by 133 percent, while the total budget grew by 93 percent.

■ SHERIFF  
 ■ PROBATION

SOURCE: L.A. COUNTY BUDGET DOCUMENTS, 2000-2001 TO 2017-2018

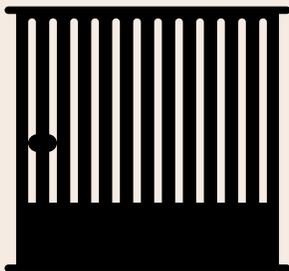
- Since 2000, the combined Sheriff's and Probation Departments' budgeted positions increased by 5,764. The Department of Mental Health's budgeted positions increased by 2,133.

- In the recommended 2017-2018 budget, the Sheriff's and Probation Departments have more than five times the number of budgeted positions than the Department of Mental Health.<sup>16</sup>

■ SHERIFF  
 ■ PROBATION  
 ■ MENTAL HEALTH

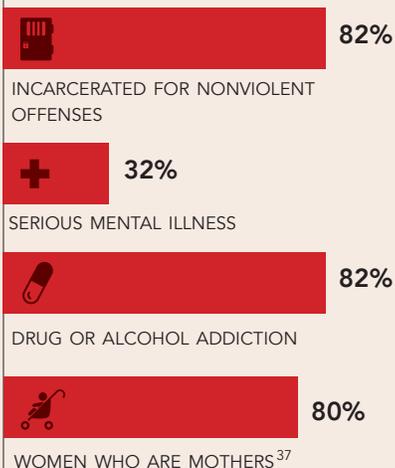
# \$3.5B

## THE COST OF CONSTRUCTING TWO NEW JAILS



The County plans to build a **1,600-bed women's facility** in Lancaster as part of the jail expansion plan.<sup>21</sup>

### Snapshot: Incarcerated Women (Nationally)



In addition to the billions of dollars the County spends on the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department every year, it now plans to dedicate an additional \$2.3 billion to the construction of two new jails.<sup>17</sup> This is a conservative estimate of the total cost, which could be as much as \$3.5 billion with the repayment of bonds,<sup>18</sup> and would also require an estimated \$400 million annually in operational costs.<sup>19</sup> In the 2017-18 recommended budget, the Sheriff's Department was appropriated \$271.6 million through the capital projects general fund budget. This was an increase from the previous year, reflecting funding for the new jail construction project.<sup>20</sup>

### How did we get here?

Throughout the last few decades, California has added thousands of new criminal laws that drive resources towards criminalization and incarceration.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, L.A. County has recently channeled hundreds of millions of state AB109 realignment<sup>23</sup> dollars back to the Sheriff's Department and Probation Department, instead of directing them into communities as deliberately contemplated by advocates and elected officials.<sup>24</sup> However, no conclusive research has indicated that either increased policing or incarceration has a meaningful impact on crime reduction efforts.<sup>25</sup> In fact, research

has shown that incarceration has zero impact on crime.<sup>26</sup>

Jurisdictions within L.A. County have experienced varied and diverging crime trends since 2010.<sup>27</sup> However, one countywide constant is the steadily increasing Sheriff's Department and Probation Department budgets and the underinvestment in community resources. This reality is compounded by the aggressive enforcement of criminal statutes by police and prosecutors, many of which simply criminalize poverty and mental health issues.<sup>28</sup> As a result, L.A. County jails are filled with people who are often desperately in need of care--and certainly not cages.

A majority of people in L.A. County jails have mental health issues, drug dependencies, or are criminalized because of their economic circumstances.<sup>29</sup> For example:

- The majority of L.A. County's incarcerated population is there for nonviolent offenses (about 63 percent of the incarcerated population). These offenses are often a result of efforts to survive without resources, a home, or community support services.
- Twenty-five percent of the total population incarcerated in L.A. County jails have mental health needs,<sup>30</sup> which are only exacerbated by jail. Nearly 44 percent of people in L.A. County jails diagnosed with a "serious mental health illness" are Black.<sup>31</sup>
- In Los Angeles (the largest city in L.A. County) arrests of homeless people have increased at a faster rate than the growth of the Los Angeles homeless population (21 percent versus 37 percent from 2011 to 2016).<sup>32</sup> Today, one in every three homeless people have been arrested--17 times the arrest rate among the total city population.<sup>33</sup>

● Estimates show that up to ten percent of the 8,000 to 10,000 people released from L.A. County jails each month end up homeless and living on the streets.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, those with mental health issues and drug dependency who are processed through the L.A. County jail system are also likely to find themselves re-arrested and re-incarcerated.<sup>35</sup>

Instead of investing in police and jails, the County should be investing in resources like housing, drug treatment, and mental health supports--public safety investments that will truly enable communities to thrive.<sup>36</sup>

## Snapshot: Our Young People (L.A. County)



cost per year to incarcerate **ONE** young person in a County 'Probation Camp'<sup>39</sup>

**\$247,236**

THE SAME AS



Full year tuition at Cal State for **50** students



cost per year to incarcerate **ONE** young person in a County Juvenile Hall

**\$281,327**

THE SAME AS



**FIVE** full-time Mental Health Counselors in schools<sup>38</sup>

## Learning From Other Localities

L.A. County can learn from other jurisdictions that are making smarter investment choices and seeing results that are more humane, effective, and cost-efficient.

**The 1811 Eastlake Project** in Seattle, Washington provides housing, mental health, and drug abuse and alcohol dependency treatment for men and women with chronic alcohol addiction who are experiencing homelessness.<sup>40</sup>

**Costs:** Operating costs were \$1.1 million while saving the city \$4 million by cutting residents medical expenses, county jail bookings, sobering center usage, and shelter usage. Annual average costs per person while homeless, the year before moving in, were \$86,062. By comparison, it costs \$13,440 per person per year to administer the housing program.<sup>41</sup>

**Impact:** Residents have access to: state-licensed mental health and substance use disorder treatment; onsite health care services; daily meals and weekly outings to food banks; case management and payee services; medication monitoring; and weekly community-building activities. Presently, this project serves 75 men and women who are experiencing chronic alcoholism.<sup>42</sup>

**The Cook County Community Triage Center** in Illinois helps to stabilize people experiencing an acute mental crisis and provides an alternative to incarceration. People can walk-in or the police can drop off people.<sup>43</sup>

**Cost:** The program was started with \$3 million from Cook County Health and Hospitals along with some federal and community grants.<sup>44</sup>

**Impact:** It is estimated that about 20 percent of the people in Cook County Jails have a mental disorder. The Community Triage Center gives people who are having a mental crisis somewhere to go apart from jail. They can either be referred by family or taken and dropped off by the police, which is done at the police officer's discretion.<sup>45</sup>

Before 2000, **Miami-Dade County** had the nation's largest jail population of mentally ill people. But in 2000, they implemented a mental health diversion program that cut back the re-offense rate to 20 percent — 55 points below Los Angeles'. The program in Miami was so successful that the city actually closed a jail.<sup>46</sup>

L.A. County law enforcement officials even took a \$18,000 trip to Miami and saw firsthand its success in diverting mentally ill arrestees into treatment, which was part of the group's "best practices" tour around the nation. L.A. Sheriff's officials met with Miami's top brass and received detailed guidance about the steps required to establish a comprehensive mental health diversion program, but thus far, nothing appears to have come of it.<sup>47</sup>

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## Where do we go from here?

**L.A. County** has the strategic opportunity and moral obligation to increase investments that address the root causes of health and safety inequities, while reducing the criminalization budgets of the Sheriff’s Department and Probation Department.

These interventions include:

★ Canceling the \$3.5 billion jail expansion plan and redirecting that money towards sustainable public safety and health investments

★ Fully funding the Office of Re-entry and Diversion, which implements criminal justice diversion for those with mental and/or substance use issues and provides re-entry support

★ Expanding youth centers and programs

★ Investing the resources necessary to provide a holistic community mental health infrastructure (which were promised in the 1980s and never delivered)<sup>48</sup>

★ Redirecting 50 percent of the Sheriff’s AB109 budget to community-based alternatives

★ Supporting community-based organizations with training on how to access County funds for their services and streamline the process for community-based organizations to acquire County funds

★ Creating mental health alternative custody pilot programs administered through the County Department of Public Health



*The strong public mandate and moral imperative for systemic reform of the criminal justice system in Los Angeles provides an opportunity for lawmakers to address the root causes of crime and violence and stop investing in failing solutions.*

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### About the Authors



is a partnership of organizations working with directly impacted communities fighting to realize the promise of diversion and re-entry through a justice reinvestment strategy for Los Angeles.



is a national network of community organizations working to create equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy through a pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda.



is a network of over 3600 radical lawyers, law students, and legal workers committed to helping build the power of Black communities and organizers.