

JUSTICELA

JusticeLA Demands Action On the Anniversary of the “Care First, Jails Last” Alternatives to Incarceration Report

Today marks two years since the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (BOS) adopted the foundational recommendations of the [Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup Final Report](#), a groundbreaking roadmap for decarceration and service expansion throughout the county. The model of the ATI Workgroup was unprecedented – not only in size and scope, but also in its inclusion of community decision-making power. Hundreds of community members were consulted and involved in the drafting of the report’s recommendations, including over 50 members of the JusticeLA coalition—several of whom were workgroup voting members and committee chairs. By adopting the foundational recommendations in the report, the BOS made a public commitment to invest county resources in developing a system based on care, not punishment. Two years later, we have not forgotten that promise and continue to hold the BOS to their commitment.

This visionary partnership between county and community produced a groundbreaking document rigorously developed through a consensus-based model. Through this collaborative process, community members worked side by side with the county, proving that when the community is allowed a seat at the table, government is more creative, holistic, efficient and effective. At the time of the adoption of the recommendations, Eunisses Hernandez, Co-Founder of La Defensa and a voting member of the county’s ATI Workgroup, called the report “a practical, yet powerful and visionary set of recommendations for how we could begin building out a decentralized community based system of care and housing first and foremost.” She uplifted the coalition’s demand to “stop the mass incarceration of our most vulnerable and unsupported community members in LA County.”

But our strong support was not without heavy concerns.

Eunisses warned that “as we move toward implementing the ATI plan, what the Supervisors must do is continue down the path of civic engagement and collaboration by allowing our communities to be part of the implementation’s decision making process. This is not the time to back away from the inclusive process that has been applauded by communities everywhere and has set the golden standard of community and county partnership and collaboration.”

Despite the collaborative success of the report, the BOS failed to continue that spirit of collaboration by not affording the ATI Workgroup and impacted community members decision-making power in the implementation of the recommendations. The BOS chose to disband the ATI Workgroup that produced the report and created an implementation process devoid of transparency, accountability and community participation. While a community cabinet has been created by the ATI Initiative, and is driving important progress towards implementing the ATI recommendations, it does not replace the 26 voting members and hundreds more community members and organizations who are necessary to ensure ATI recommendations are implemented correctly. The choice to deviate from the original process has slowed down the implementation of the recommendations, and two years later, the community continues to wait

for the significant service expansion promised by the BOS, particularly for the 6,000 people incarcerated with mental health needs, and 6,000 that are incarcerated pretrial-most of whom are people of color [The Board has made some strides in implementation](#), including the recent creation of an independent pretrial services agency, but those policy changes will remain ineffective without meaningful budget changes.

It's time that the County's budget reflects the *Care First* vision.

Two years ago, Ivette Alé, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Dignity and Power Now, called the BOS' adoption of the recommendations in 2020 "an historic course-correction" but named that "in order to fully implement the vision shared by the Board and community members, the County must significantly and swiftly divest from law enforcement and invest in the implementation of the Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup recommendations." JusticeLA understood that in order to implement a *Care First Roadmap*, we needed a *Care First Budget*.

In order to see those investments realized, JusticeLA partnered with over one-hundred organizations to pass the historic Measure J Ballot Initiative, which required the county to invest at least 10% of locally generated revenue towards alternatives to incarceration and community investments, like minority owned businesses. To their credit, the county committed to implementing Measure J, despite the court's objections; however, the county continues to short-change this voter-mandated investment. Only \$100 million of net county costs were invested in alternatives out of a \$36.2 billion budget, falling short of the \$300 million demand from the community for year one of implementation.

But the Board has the opportunity to course-correct once again.

The BOS set a groundbreaking new precedent, and made Los Angeles County a national leader, with the adoption of the ATI recommendations in 2020. But in order for this transformative vision to be fully realized, the BOS must continue being bold, innovative and above all, responsive to the demands of our communities. We call on the BOS to not only significantly scale up investments, but also return to the transparent process that created the ATI report and set clear timelines and benchmarks for implementation. Only then will we see the promise of decarceration, community wellness and racial justice fulfilled.