



## Men's Central Jail Closure- Press Conference and Direct Action

March 30, 2022 8:30am

[Run of Show](#)

### List of Speakers

- Mark-Anthony Clayton Johnson - Dignity & Power NOW
- Dolores Canales- the Bail Project
- Helen Jones - Dignity & Power NOW
- Jose Osuna - Brilliant Corners
- Rojas- Young Women's Freedom Center & The Sister Warriors Coalition
- Tauheedah Shakur - Youth Justice Coalition
- Akili - Black Lives Matter-LA/ReImagineLA Coalition
- Rita Garcia- The TransLatin@ Coalition
- Christian D. Green- Cancel the Contract, Reform LA Jails
- Kurt Peterson- Unite Here Local 11

### Timing

Please arrive no later than 8:20am as the press conference will begin promptly at 8:30am.

### Notes

There will be ASL translators as well as Spanish translation. We encourage speakers to speak in the language they feel comfortable speaking in, speaking from the heart.

### Context:

March 30, 2022 marks the one-year anniversary of the publication of the Men's Central Jail (MCJ) Closure Report. Men's Central Jail is Los Angeles' largest and oldest jail facility, and its unsafe, crowded, crumbling structure stands as a landmark of the dominance of mass incarceration in Los Angeles. The MCJ Closure Report outlines a roadmap for the closure of Men's Central Jail within 18-24 months, yet, the County has not taken the necessary steps to effectively close MCJ and direct funding and resources into our communities.

We stand with the families of those who have lost their lives inside of LA County jails. In 2021, 55 people died in LA County jails, in the custody of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. The County has the finances and legal power to close Men's Central Jail and ensure that decarceration is safe and supportive for our communities. The time is now!

## Our Demands:

1. **Demand #1 Commit to closing MCJ without a replacement by March 2023.** And have the Board set benchmarks for closure.
2. **Demand #2 (Fund beds & track progress): Allocate \$237 million dollars to create 3,600 mental health beds by March 2023.**
3. **Demand #3 (Pretrial services agency): Establish and fully fund an independent pretrial services agency in 3-6 months.**

## Themes and talking points:

- **People power and the time is NOW!**
  - Today March 30, 2022 marks the one-year anniversary of the Men's Central Jail Closure Report. Today is also a moment to bring attention to the Board of Supervisors' accountability to the people power that got us to these historic wins.
  - It was hundreds of people showing up at the BOS; tens of thousands of letters and testimony; people and communities whose lived experience could tell the Board loud and clear what all of us here know so well: this jail needs to close now, and we need real investments and care support in our communities. The people power is what made clear we needed Care First, Jails Last. The Board has no other choice now but to do the right thing.
  - Because of our power, the Board canceled the jail contract in 2019. A year later in 2020, we pushed them to commit to closing MCJ without a new jail. In the wake of the national uprisings after George Floyd's death, they *said* the right things. They made the right promises. And now, in 2022, it's time for them to *do* the right things. To make good on their promises.
- **Anniversary of the report leading into the demands**
  - One year ago today, a county workgroup published the MCJ Closure report, which gave the board what they said they needed: a detailed plan for how to close MCJ and invest in the community infrastructure we need to close it by March 2023.
  - Two years ago this month, another county workgroup published the Care First, Jails Last report. Which gave them more than 100 detailed recommendations, 26 immediate next steps.

- We're out here today to make the message clear to the board. In Supervisor Solis' own words: you all have "taken ample time to explore, analyze, and study"; and now "we need to close MCJ."
- **Introducing demands and connection to report** We are making these demands today: (1) Commit to closing MCJ without a replacement by March 2023. And have the Board set benchmarks for closure. (2) Fund beds & track progress by allocating \$237 million dollars to create 3,600 mental health beds by March 2023, and (3) Establish and fully fund an independent pretrial services agency in 3-6 months.
  - The MCJ Closure report made clear, to decrease the jail population below 8,500 and close MCJ through a 'care first' approach, the county needs to prioritize supporting more releases for two large groups in the jail: (1) people incarcerated pretrial; and (2) people with mental health conditions. (Note: obviously there is overlap between these groups.)
  - They noted that, for the pretrial population, the county needed to fund pathways out of jail for way more people and not just for the most minor cases.
    - The new pretrial services entity can do this but it needs to be fully funded and it needs to target the types of people that get stuck in jail (i.e. people charged with more serious felonies).
- **Incarceration is Deadly**
  - The TIME IS NOW! People are dying.
  - In 2021, 55 people died while in custody of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. That is more than one person a week, dying in the LA County jails. This is unacceptable.
  - Yes, people are dying of COVID in overcrowded conditions while deputies who refuse to get vaccinated or wear masks come into their living spaces every day. But even if we did not count COVID deaths in 2021, it still would have been the deadliest year in LA County Jail in at least 20 years.
  - What *could* BOS have done in 2021? They could have allocated money to create the 3600 mental health beds that the county workgroup *they* created told them to. They could have started closing the most dangerous areas of MCJ. They could have demanded LASD exercise its authority to release people to protect those in its care. What did they do? They allowed 55 people to die in LASD custody. Like Supervisor Mitchell said in her own words, "Every day this jail remains open, [you] fail in your obligations to those who live and work there."
- **Incarceration destroys mental health**

- The MCJ closure report found that it is more costly to incarcerate people with mental health conditions than it is to place them in community-based care. Important points from the report (visualized [here](#)):
  - The average daily cost of incarcerating people in mental health units in jail: \$548
  - The average daily cost of community-based housing and treatment for the same group: \$207
- Currently there are over 5,600 people with mental health issues in LA County jails. Numerous County commissions and workgroups have called for the BOS and CEO to fund thousands of new treatment beds.
- The MCJ Closure Report called for allocating \$237 million to fund 3,600 mental health beds immediately so successful programs could scale up and support releases from jail.
  - The board has heard this call to fund new treatment beds repeatedly. County workgroup after workgroup has made this need clear and plain, yet the Board has refused to allocate the money. While the Board drags its feet, vulnerable people are deteriorating in jail and coming home in worse conditions. Even the Director of Correctional Health Services, Tim Belavich, has said that these jails are “not the appropriate place to treat” folks struggling with mental health. This is the opposite of a care first, jails last approach. If the Board of Supervisors won’t listen to the workgroups they’ve convened, the report recommendations they asked for, or the officials they’ve hired, our communities are here to make them listen.
  - As the Correctional Health Services Director, Tim Belavich, said, “By default, we have become the largest treatment facility in the county. And we’re a jail. I would say a jail facility is not the appropriate place to treat someone’s mental illness.”

- **Incarceration disproportionately impacts our Black and Latinx communities**

- The County MUST commit itself to supporting historically underserved communities. As a decarceration policy, the County must commit to prioritizing release and support for Black and Latinx Angelenos who are inside. On any given day, 85% of the incarcerated population in LA are Black and Latinx Angelenos.
- All decarceration efforts and policies must focus on the over-representation of Black people within the jail population, paying special attention to Black women and Black people with mental health needs.
- While Black people make up 8% of the LA population, they represent 38% of those incarcerated in LA County Jails. While the jail population decreased during

the COVID-19 pandemic, racial disparities worsened for Black and Latinx populations. A 2020 study showed that Black women were spending the longest days in custody and that Black people with mental health needs were released at significantly lower rates than their white counterparts. The County MUST address the racial injustices of incarceration and prioritize Black and Latinx community members in the County's decarceration efforts.

- Gender Justice

- MCJ closure must be coupled with safe and supportive decarceration of other facilities in Los Angeles, namely Central Regional Detention Facility (CRDF). Decarceration efforts must specifically target the release of two-spirit-LGBQ+ TGI individuals and cis-gender women. The Gender Responsive Advisory Committee (GRAC) report outlined that the majority of those housed in CRDF—and in the County jail system's K6G unit—*do not need to be in jail at all*.
- **CRDF is a dangerous place for everyone inside—and especially so for people of color, trans individuals, gender-nonconforming individuals, and cis women incarcerated there. In addition to having to contend with overcrowding (and the concomitant hygiene and safety issues), these community members are at higher risk of gender-based harassment and sexual assault at any moment in CRDF.**
- According to a UCLA Million Dollar Hoods report, the top 5 charges against women in Los Angeles are survival acts, such as petty theft, driving on a suspended license and drug possession. The incarceration of these women does nothing to address the root causes - poverty and systemic inequality. Instead, the county must invest in the health & wellness of women and their families by expanding GBI programs, community based health care and access to housing.

- Accountability to Families

- LASD not only has a record of failing to support families, they have a record of terrorizing them. We know what they do in the community, but we also know what they do behind the walls of places like MCJ. It's a disgrace that the County Board of Supervisors could ever drag their feet knowing the human right crisis happening in their backyard. MCJ has been a source of harm for generations, and continues to get worse. It should be no less of a priority than many of the county's other projects that cater to gentrification or wealthy families.

- Housing Justice

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- To stop the cycle of incarceration, many people need housing to stabilize after release and for the long-term. Housing is safety.
- The county keeps looking for shortcuts and imaginary quick fixes to the housing crisis but we need broader housing access, including the successful permanent supportive housing model for diversion; affordable and accessible housing by developers.
- **Stop incarcerating the youth!**
  - Like Youth Justice Reimagined, the Board has made many of the right promises but now needs to follow up with meaningful action.
  - Transitional age youth are inside of Men's Central Jail. Incarcerating youth in both MCJ and LA County probation camps is inhumane and represents the county's lack of care and investment in young people. The county must invest in youth through funding youth services and the Department of Youth Development.