

# TALKING POINTS FOR 3/30/2022 MCJ CLOSURE ACTION

## What is the problem?

- Men's Central Jail (MCJ) is unsafe, crowded, crumbling, and is a landmark of the dominance of mass incarceration in Los Angeles.
- The people most impacted by the harmful system of incarceration in LA are Black and Latinx. Closing MCJ must be a priority racial justice issue for the county.
- Thousands of people are stuck in jail simply because they cannot afford bail.
- Thousands of people are stuck in jail because the county has not sufficiently funded community-based mental health treatment beds or effective mental health alternatives to incarceration programs.

## What are we demanding?

- The Board asked for and got a plan to close MCJ within 18-24 months. They've had the plan in hand for exactly a year now. **The county must commit to close MCJ by March 2023.**
- To close MCJ without a replacement, the county must actively decrease the jail population, especially people incarcerated pretrial and people with mental illness.
  - To decrease pretrial incarceration, **the county must establish and fully fund an independent pretrial services agency in 3-6 months.**
  - To decrease the mental health population, **the county must allocate \$237 million to create 3,600 new mental health beds by March 2023.**

## Why are we rallying now?

- **March 30, 2022 marks the one-year anniversary of the publication of the Men's Central Jail (MCJ) Closure Report.** The report outlines how to close MCJ within 18-24 months. It was created by a county workgroup with diverse and knowledgeable stakeholders.
- The Board has committed to a 'care first' vision and to closing MCJ without a replacement but hasn't taken the necessary steps, like directing sufficient funding and resources into our communities or the pathways out of jail.
- In 2021, 55 people died in LA County jails, in the custody of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.
- The Board responds to people power. Hundreds of us showing up and speaking out is why they canceled the jail contract in 2019, why they adopted the 'care first' approach, and why they will now respond to our accountability.

## **Closing MCJ is a racial justice issue.**

- [83%](#) of people in LA jails are Black and Latinx.
- Black people are only 8% of people in LA County but [28%](#) of people in jail in LA.
- Black people are often left behind, even when there are more releases. A [2020 study](#) found that, during early COVID releases, Black people with mental health needs were released at lower rates than white counterparts and that Black women spent the longest time in custody before release.
- A [2018 study](#) found the financial toll of paying bail for pretrial release largely impacts Black, Latinx, and the most economically aggrieved communities.

## **Closing MCJ is a gender justice issue.**

- The MCJ Closure workgroup’s plan called on the county to also decarcerate other facilities, including Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF), the “women’s” jail, and the LGBT units in the jail system. We must see the Board’s action steps prioritize this in the plan to close MCJ.
- The LA jails are not safe for cisgender women, transgender people, gender-non-conforming people, and LGBTQ+ people—many of whom are in jail because of untreated trauma or survival acts. Just [two months ago](#), Destiny Ortega died at CRDF a day after being arrested on suspicion of a parole violation.
- [Nearly half](#) of women in jail are pretrial. [66%](#) of women in jail have mental health needs. Our demands would impact women in jail.
- The county’s Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) Care First, Jails Last [Report](#) created a roadmap for decreasing the incarceration of cisgender women and LGBTQ+ people. Those recommendations must be a priority to implement.
- The county’s own Gender Responsive Advisory Committee (GRAC) wrote a report outlining how most people in CRDF and the LGBT jail units do not need to be in jail at all.

## **Closing MCJ is a disability justice issue. People with mental health needs must urgently be released to treatment settings.**

- [43%](#) of people in jail (5,605 people) have mental health needs. The high needs mental health population has increased in the last year.
  - The MCJ Closure workgroup [found](#) that it is more costly to incarcerate people with mental health conditions than it is to place them in community-based care.
    - Avg daily cost of incarcerating people in mental health units in jail: \$548
    - Avg daily cost of community-based housing and treatment for the same group: \$207

- Even the Correctional Health Services Director, Tim Belavich, has [said](#), “a jail facility is not the appropriate place to treat someone’s mental illness.”
- Numerous County commissions and workgroups have called for the Board and CEO to fund thousands of new mental health treatment beds to support releases from jail.
- People with mental illnesses are trapped in jail just because there aren’t treatment facilities in the community and the county has cut off funding for successful alternative to incarceration programs. This is inhumane and the opposite of a ‘care first’ approach.
- The Board and CEO must allocate \$237 million this budget cycle to create 3,600 mental health beds.

### **Closing MCJ is a housing justice issue.**

- 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 unmediated by developers.

### **Closing MCJ is a youth justice issue.**

- 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.