



April 4, 2022

JusticeLA Decries LA County Board of Supervisors' Response to Community Demands to Close Men's Central Jail

On March 30th, JusticeLA held a press conference and rally commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Men's Central Jail Closure Report. Hundreds of community members gathered in front of Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration to demand a timeline for the closure of Men's Central Jail, and tangible and significant investments in alternatives to incarceration. Echoing back the Board of Supervisors' (BOS) own rhetoric of urgency, civil rights leaders, organizers, formerly incarcerated people and their families reminded the county of their promises and exposed their inaction.

In response to the press conference, the county and Supervisor Solis' office issued a [statement](#) claiming they could not commit to a timeline for closure because it is, "crucial to proceed methodically to ensure support systems are firmly in place to ensure public safety [and] avoid worsening the homelessness crisis." However, community and numerous county workgroups for *years* have called on the county to invest in specific numbers and types of support and residential mental health treatment beds that would decrease the jail population and facilitate closure. To date, the county has not acted methodically but instead negligently. By dragging their feet and proceeding without urgency, the BOS and CEO have effectively trapped people in jail because the county refuses to put support systems in place that would encourage releases from jail.

The county's statement is telling. The county would rather hide away its houselessness and mental health crises behind jail walls, continuing to torture our most vulnerable in a dilapidated jail where the County has been violating the constitutional rights of people with mental illness for more than 25 years, rather than expedite their release and risk exposing the breadth of these crises.

It is alarming that the BOS cites the JFA report as a guidepost for a MCJ closure timeline - a report whose inaccuracies BOS has publicly acknowledged.

As JusticeLA pointed out in August 2021, the JFA Report's recommendations are incongruent with the Board's care first directive and fail to incorporate decarceration policies that have been developed and vetted by county workgroups and supported by the Board of Supervisors themselves. The BOS voted to close MCJ before the issuance of the JFA Report. Why is the BOS supporting a timeline and recommendations that run contrary to their intentions? Any suggestion of adherence to the JFA report's recommendations undermines the Board's stated commitment to Care First, Jails Last.

JusticeLA's demands are pragmatic and in line with the recommendations of hundreds of experts, many of whom were picked by the county to develop guidelines for MCJ closure. For the county to suggest that these demands are anything but pragmatic is offensive.

Workgroups and commissions have provided step by step approaches for decarceration. The MCJ Closure Report - from a workgroup chaired by both the Office of Diversion and Reentry AND the Los Angeles

Sheriff's Department - identifies exactly how much funding is needed to safely close MCJ and identifies feasible funding streams through Care First Community Investment, AB 109 dollars, AB 900, and American Rescue Plan funding. If the county was taking concrete steps to close MCJ, following any of the recommendations provided by the Alternatives to Incarceration Report and MCJ closure report, then it would have made substantial progress towards funding and developing residential mental health treatment beds and slashing the number of people with mental illness in the jails. However, the county's actions to close MCJ are negligible at best, and if work is being done behind the scenes, it needs to be transparent.

The county's implication that the community's vetted and accepted decarceration policy would potentially worsen the homelessness crisis is shameful. What this says to us is that the county would rather incarcerate houseless people and people with mental health needs than threaten their political capital by making the urgent, significant investments needed to decarcerate.

Even long term plans require upfront investments.

Continuing to kick the can down the road in hopes another Board will be willing to take the political hit to do what's right, is not good policy making. It's not good leadership. Millions of people voted to refocus the county budget on services and desperately want to see 'care first' solutions to houselessness and mental health crises, yet we've seen little to no financial commitment from the county. Further, dismissing the demands of the very community members that built and delivered the Care First vision to the county, implying that those demands lack substance, pragmatism or sophistication, demonstrates the very condescension and paternalism that we've long suspected is the undercurrent of the partnership between the county and community all along. The community will not be tokenized. We will not be silenced. We will not stop until Men's Central Jail is shut down and this dark chapter of incarceration in Los Angeles County is finally closed.