

September 10, 2018

President Wilma Chan  
Alameda County Board of Supervisors  
County of Alameda Administration Building  
1221 Oak Street, #536, Oakland, CA 94612

Honorable Alameda County Board President Wilma Chan,

We the undersigned, a collaborative of public health advocates, respectfully and in good faith address this letter to you expressing our strong support for an independent audit of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office ("ACSO") We commend you for publicly supporting the call for an independent audit of the ACSO. We hope you agree that this is not solely a matter of public protection but also a matter of public health.

As you are aware, thanks to common sense probation policies, innovative investments in re-entry programs, and the 2014 passage of Proposition 47 by California voters that reduced penalties for some crimes, the population of Alameda County jails has decreased from 4,500 to only 2,400. Nevertheless, incarceration spending in Alameda County has skyrocketed, and with fewer people behind bars, The ACSO's budget has grown by over 60% since 2008, bringing the sheriff's total budget to nearly \$444 million this year. For Alameda County, these budget increases have meant less investment in public health resources that can help low-income communities thrive—like job training; healthcare, including mental health services; access to affordable housing; and youth development services.

While the Alameda County jail population has significantly decreased over the years, the number of civil settlements has

increased. According to an East Bay Express article from July 2018, ACSO has accrued more civil settlement payouts than any other law enforcement agency in the region. This is truly alarming, not merely because of the millions in taxpayer money being used to settle payouts, but because each civil case exposes the terrible human impact of negligence and mistreatment. In June, we learned that within the span of just three days, two prisoners died while in custody in Santa Rita Jail ("SRJ") In late July, we learned that a twenty-six-year-old woman, Jessica St. Louis, died just hours after being released from SRJ. She was released in the middle of the night without any means of ensuring her well being or safety She walked alone for nearly two miles to a closed BART station and was shortly after found dead outside the station platform. According to the sheriff's department, two of the noted recent deaths are attributed to 'drug overdoses'. As we await for the official coroners report in these cases, it is apparent to us that this is a matter of public health. Since 2013, there has now been a total of 34 in-custody deaths (including Jessica St. Louis). This is extremely troubling and clearly warrants a thorough assessment of current policies and practices.

In addition, just last year, a homeless woman was forced to give birth alone while she lay in a cold, dirty concrete solitary confinement cell after guards and medical staff ignored her screams for hours. A pending lawsuit alleges horrific, unsafe, unsanitary and inhumane conditions for female prisoners in our SRJ. In 2016, after much controversy, the county approved a 135-million dollar, three-year contract with CA Forensic Medical Group ("CFMG"). Per the current contract, CFMG contracts with ACSO to provide medical care, including prenatal and maternal services. As the contract nears its end and given the number of rising in-custody deaths, it would be irresponsible to not thoroughly assess and evaluate the current

overall policies and conditions of our jails. As the number of public allegations of abuse and neglect mount it has become clear to us that these are not isolated incidents, rather they reflect something deeply broken within the ACSO. We are gravely concerned with the negligent level of care provided and life-threatening living conditions facing those currently incarcerated in Alameda County Jails.

An independent audit of the ACSO would thoroughly assess the cost of operating the Alameda County jail system while identifying opportunities for cost savings. In addition, an independent performance audit would generate crucial evaluative information which can be used to implement national best practices, policy, programmatic, operational and healthcare recommendations. The positive public health impact that would result from an audit is measured in lives saved. An independent audit would not only ensure that the county is fulfilling its duty to be a good steward of public resources, it would also fortify our commitment to accountability and transparency. Public health promotes and protects the health of all people and the communities where they live, sleep, learn, work and play. If policies and practices are in place that harm our communities, we are morally obligated to act. This letter is more than a request, this letter is a call for action. We strongly urge you to hear the voices of the communities we advocate for and ensure that we get a fully independent audit of the ACSO"