

INTERFAITH COALITION FOR JUSTICE IN OUR JAILS (ICJJ)

NEWSLETTER

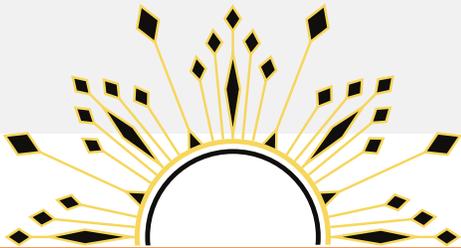
ISSUE NO 2 | JULY 2021



Who We Are: Mission Statement

The ICJJ seeks to reduce incarceration as a response to social problems in Alameda County, CA and to decrease harmful conditions in the jail.

We advocate to decrease the number of those imprisoned and close the revolving door to jail - especially for those with mental health or housing needs. The jail must be safe, humane, and supportive of successful reentry into our communities.



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Outreach Work Group

Meg Bowerman, Outreach Chair

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Meet Our Current Congregations!

Congregation Netivot Shalom
First Unitarian Church of Oakland
Kehilla Community Synagogue
Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church
Montclair Presbyterian Church
Plymouth United Church of Christ
St. Columba Catholic Church
Skyline Community Church

Mental Health Updates from Myrna Schwartz

We were active in the second phase of the Justice Involved Mental Health Task Force (Feb-Apr '21), advocating for housing supports, diversion programs, and wrap-around re-entry services to keep people with mental illness out of jail and cared for in the community. Looking forward, our workgroup plans to lobby for the appointment of strong allies to committee seats and for an Action-Implementation Plan to emerge that closely follows the roadmap outlined in the JIMH final report.

These priorities are well represented in the JIMH final report, approved by the Steering committee in mid-June, and scheduled for presentation to ACBH on July 15th. We joined with a coalition of community groups in support of Decarcerate Alameda County's (DAC) "Care First, Jails Last" resolution, and we celebrated its unanimous approval by the Board of Supervisors on May 25th. A last-minute amendment by Supervisor Carson mandated creation of a 25-member interdepartmental oversight committee, similar to what community groups had called for, but with more seats going to law enforcement and fewer to community groups. ICJJ continues to advocate for interdepartmental, community-partnered implementation bodies and other means of effectively enacting the policy goals of "Care First, Jails Last".

In recent months, the Mental Health working group has met individually with several Alameda County officials to assess who is moveable on the issues we care about. In one recent meeting, Supervisor Valle underscored his support for a new mental health wing at Santa Rita Jail (very disappointing: we want mental health services out in the community) but on a more positive note he floated the prospect that going forward, each dollar spent in Santa Rita Jail should be matched by a dollar invested in community prevention, treatment, and other services.

Supervisor Haubert, meeting with ICJJ for just the second time, responded positively to our talking points, committing his help in breaking down the silos that prevent interdepartmental action and instilling a moral imperative to get this accomplished.



Photo:
Santa Rita
Jail Overhead

From ICJJ member **Bob Britton** guest commentary:

Another Suicide at Santa Rita

<https://www.davisvanguard.org/2021/04/another-suicide-at-santa-rita-jail-sparks-cry-for-sheriff-oversight-in-alameda-county/>

The ICJJ website is here! We have been working on the development of a website with assistance from our intern, Rachel Liu.

It officially launched on June 22th, 2021.

<https://www.icjjalamedacounty.org/>

We hope you will share the website –and this newsletter – far and wide with your networks of communities of faith and other people interested in the state of our county jail.

See link for other Alameda County news chosen by our ICJJ members:

<https://www.icjjalamedacounty.org/resources>

ICJJ Response To U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

Report of Santa Rita Jail Conditions

Background: [Here](#) is a comment letter that the *Interfaith Coalition for Justice in our Jails* sent to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) on Friday, May 14th. The letter applauds a recent DOJ report highly critical of conditions at Santa Rita Jail and of the inadequate community behavioral health and other services that otherwise would serve to keep people from ending up incarcerated at Santa Rita. We encourage you to consider initiating your own communication with the Department Of Justice.

Note that we end our letter with this message:

We urge the DOJ and the Attorney General to intervene in related private suits that threaten further to promote the single-minded approach we mention above of addressing the problems in the Jail. Please review any proposed settlement of [Babu vs. Ahern](#) or other litigation that focuses on resolutions only or primarily on upgrades to County Jail facilities.

Settlement of [Babu](#), for example, must focus on the provision of community-based mental health services and eliminate reliance on use of the County jail in lieu of care for individuals with serious mental illness in non-institutionalized settings.

Alameda County requires comprehensive, proactive planning and resource allocation, not reactive, litigation-driven attention to jail crises when things go wrong. Yesterday we learned that Alameda County policy-making-by-litigation and antithetical to the message of DOJ is on-track to continue at Tuesday's meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

A really problematic matter on the Board's agenda, Item 43.1, would add funding into the so-called Santa Rita Jail Mental Health Program and Services Unit Project budget leading toward construction of a \$62 million, 38,000 square foot building on the Santa Rita "campus."

http://www.acgov.org/board/bos_calendar/documents/DocsAgendaReg_05_18_21/GENERAL%20ADMINISTRATION/Regular%20Calendar/GSA_311674.pdf

This is not good news and is particularly ironic when the Board – apparently talking out of with the other side of its mouth – is about to endorse a "Care First, Jails Last" resolution that would attempt to slow the concentration of behavioral health resources at the jail.

"Alameda County requires comprehensive, proactive planning and resource allocation, not reactive, litigation-driven attention to jail crises..."

Beyond the \$62 million, how many more dollars will go into Sheriff's Office staffing, behavioral health personnel, upkeep and others costs that might, otherwise, support people in the community with mental health, substance abuse, co-occurring problems, lack of affordable housing, and other challenges?

Back to the Care First movement, we fear there is no provision in the construction project for down-sizing as Care First takes off. If built, will this massive facility be half-utilized five years after construction?

We hope so. But what a waste!

Transparency about this building process is needed.

And construction needs to be put on hold until Care First is enacted and planning begins anew with an eye toward many fewer people detained at Santa Rita.

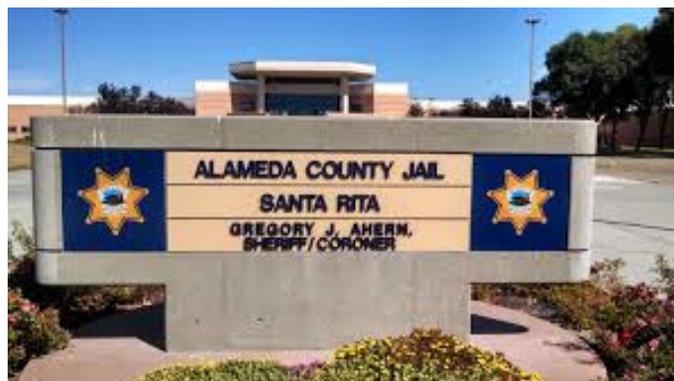


Photo: Front of Santa Rita Jail

Legislative advocacy updates from Merle Lustig

SB 271: Authored by Senator Weiner (SF) and co-sponsored by the Wellstone Democratic Club, this bill would restore long-standing eligibility requirements that will make California Sheriff elections more democratic and diverse. The legislation is sponsored by the California Immigrant Policy Center (CPIC), NextGen California, Secure Justice and Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club. Currently, only members of law enforcement are allowed to seek this office. SB 271 would have broadened the criteria to include individuals who do not have a law enforcement background but are otherwise capable of seeking the office of county sheriff. This bill will not be heard this year and will be brought up again next year.



SB 300: Authored by Senator Cortese (San Jose) and co-sponsored by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, this bill would ensure that the death penalty and life without parole would not be imposed on a person who may have been an accomplice in a murder of another person but did not commit the murder and did not intend for another person to die.

SB 300 has been pulled because it appeared there would not be enough votes to get out of the Senate Appropriations committee. However, if it gets a 2/3 vote to turn it into an urgency bill in the State Senate, it can move forward without committee approval, which is what the author and co-sponsors are going for attempting. The bill needs a 2/3 vote to be enacted regardless because the special circumstances provisions being removed were the subject of a voter initiative.

SB 731: Authored by Senators Durazo (Los Angeles) and Bradford (Englewood/San Pedro), and sponsored by Californians for Safety & Justice, this bill would implement a system to seal arrest and conviction records if the arrest occurred on or after January 1, 2021.

Currently arrest and conviction records create significant barriers for individuals reentering society after serving their sentences in prison or jail, and act as a second level of punishment.

This bill would make it easier for formerly incarcerated people to apply and obtain employment, housing, SNAP benefits, PELL Grants, coach their kids' sports, and reintegrate back into our communities.

SB 731 has passed the State Senate and is currently being heard in State Assembly Committee.

Medi-Cal Restoration Working Group

CCP Process & Evaluation Committee has invited us to present a specific proposal for Medi-Cal enrollment of detainees and those being released from custody. Our Medi-Cal Working Group presented at the June 2 CCP meeting. Although there was support for Bob Britton's proposal, it was moved to the Board's Public Protection Committee, instead of the CCP Executive Committee; Bob is awaiting Andrea Ford and Dave Brown's responses.

Other News

Bruce Schmiechen organized a group that worked on the Oakland Police Commission formation to formulate a proposal to the County for Sheriff's Oversight under California Assembly Bill (AB) 1185. The proposal was presented in June when the Public Protection Committee is getting a report from County Counsel recommending action for Alameda County to take based, in part, on County Counsel's assessment of best practices elsewhere. We want to ensure any forthcoming legislation from the Board of Supervisors has teeth.

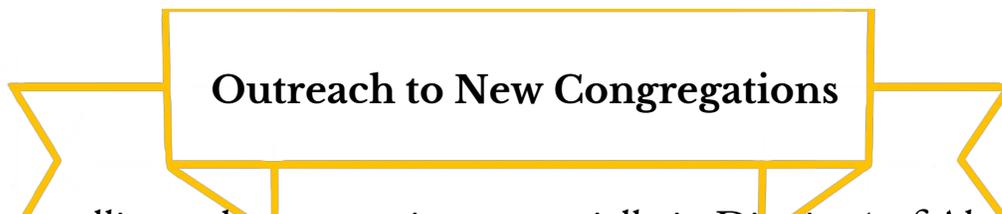
ICJJ's Priorities:

- Educate, engage and mobilize diverse communities of Faith in strategic actions that hold elected officials accountable for reductions in the Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) budget and for more humane policies and practices at Santa Rita Jail.
- Bring about the reduction of the jail population to the minimum essential to actual public safety.
- Contribute to improved jail conditions, discharge planning and re-entry, as well as diversion programs.

Our Accomplishments

We are working to reinstate Medi-Cal benefits by monitoring the Alameda County Board of Supervisors Public Protection Committee. We advocate that Medi-Cal-eligible prisoners discharged from Santa Rita, have Medi-Cal reinstated before leaving the jail.

We work to address mental health needs in our communities. We are meeting with the Justice Involved Mental Health Task Force, Alameda County Board of Supervisors, and other County officials to press for our priorities: program and policy actions that are near-term, economically effective, and most impactful for diverting those with mental illness from jail.



We need more allies and congregations, especially in District 1 of Alameda County: Livermore, Dublin, Fremont areas. If you would like to have a zoom meeting with your congregations/clergy/councils to learn more on how to advocate for prisoners and former prisoners, please contact Meg Bowerman: megbowerman@gmail.com.