

INTERFAITH COALITION FOR JUSTICE IN OUR JAILS (ICJJ) NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO 10 | September 2023



a committee of [Faith in Action East Bay](#)

Visit our website at

www.icjjalamedacounty.org

Contact:

Meg Bowerman, ICJJ Outreach

Email: megbowerman@gmail.com

Member Congregations

- Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley ~
- First Church Berkeley, UCC ~
- First Unitarian Church, Oakland ~ Interfaith Council of Alameda County ~ Kehilla Community Synagogue, Piedmont ~
- Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, Oakland ~
- Lighthouse Mosque, Oakland ~ Montclair Presbyterian Church, Oakland ~ Plymouth United Church of Christ, Oakland ~
- St. Columba Catholic Church, Oakland ~
- Skyline Community Church, United Church of Christ, Oakland ~
- Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward

Who We Are:

Mission Statement

The ICJJ seeks to reduce incarceration as a response to social problems in Alameda County, California, 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.

Why we are against projected Santa Rita Jail expansion

In spite of adopting a Care First Jails Last (CFJL) Resolution two years ago, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors (BOS) continues to pour money into Santa Rita Jail while withholding needed investment in the community for those with substance use and mental health challenges. The most recent example of BOS's poor stewardship of taxpayer dollars is its recent stealth approval of \$27 million for construction of a 36,000 square foot Jail Mental Health Program and Services Unit to house offices for clinical staff the county has been unable to hire, to serve a shrinking jail population. BOS authorized this expenditure without consulting with its own appointed experts – the Mental Health Advisory Board (MHAB) or CFJL Task Force. Both bodies have now gone on record opposing the proposed jail expansion.

Jail is no place for people with mental illness! The Board of Supervisors' approval of an expansion of our county jail facility is a huge waste of taxpayer dollars. The jail is bigger than it needs to be, and existing space could be repurposed for needed clinical offices. The Sheriff's huge budget comes at



June 13, 2023, Alameda County Administrative Office Building. Photo: Bob Britton

the expense of critical community-based treatment beds, early intervention, and supportive housing for our most vulnerable residents.

On June 13, 2023, ICJJ co-sponsored a lively rally in front of the BOS offices demanding more budget transparency and an end to the projected jail expansion. Ignoring our protest the jail expansion project continues to be included in the 2023/2024

county budget. ICJJ and our parent organization, Faith in Action East Bay, have sent letters to our supervisors asking them to reverse that decision.

- We demand money be spent in the community for behavioral health services, not additional services at the jail only.
- We demand transparency and public involvement in budgeting decisions.
- See story on this page, following “Sheriff oversight” for an action September 19 at the next Board of Supervisors’ meeting.

No more deaths in the jail

Representatives from ICJJ, Stop Deaths in the Jail campaign, Families Advocating for the Seriously Mentally Ill, Restore Oakland, and the Care First Community Coalition met with representatives from Attorney General Bonta’s office on Aug 21, 2023.

We discussed:

- **Deaths in the County Jail:** There have been over 70 deaths in Alameda County Jail since 2014. The Attorney General’s office flags jails if there is increased community attention and acknowledged that we brought important community input to their office.
- **Expansion of Alameda County Jail:** The Board of Supervisors requested funding from the Board of State and Community Corrections for a new building at Santa Rita Jail for treatment and mental health staff. State Senator Nancy Skinner raised important questions about proceeding given strong community opposition. The AG’s office followed up with Senator Skinner to see if she got a response from the county and she has not!
- **The acquisition and use of scattershot weapons in the jail:** We asked the Attorney General to investigate whether the use of such weaponry against Santa Rita detainees is consistent with State law. The AG’s office said that they would follow-up on accounting for the use of weapons in the jail.

It was a very constructive meeting!

Stop Deaths in the Jail Coalition Goals for 2023/2024:

- Continue to meet with representatives of the sheriff’s department:
- What changes have they made to decrease deaths in the jail?
- Are they using evidence-based procedures to prevent suicides?

- Educate the public about preventable deaths in the jail.
- Alert the media with each new death.

If you are interested in the Stop Deaths in the Jail campaign, please contact Micky Duxbury at Mickydux612@gmail.com.

Sheriff oversight

Independent Sheriff Oversight is provided for under California legislation known as AB 1185. Oversight of any Sheriff’s Office can be enacted by a county Board of Supervisors or by the voters by ballot initiative. The Alameda County Board of Supervisors is scheduled to act on a community proposal for Sheriff Oversight at its regular meeting on September 19, 2023.

The Public Protection Committee of the Board will be recommending both an oversight board and an inspector general. Other provisions strongly supported by large majorities at townhalls in 2021 include exclusion of former police officers from an oversight body and legal counsel independent of the County Counsel. Both are opposed by Supervisors Miley and Haubert.

County Counsel Donna Ziegler maintains both the Sheriff and an oversight body must be represented by her office of County Counsel. She refuses to provide the legal basis for her opinion, maintaining that it is “attorney/client privileged.”

ICJJ, the ACLU, the League of Women Voters, All of Us or None and other groups decry the absurdity that the County Counsel can represent both sides in potential litigation and contest the legality of her secrecy. Weak oversight is worse than no oversight.



Calls for Sheriff Oversight were raised when the Oathkeepers, a domestic terrorist organization, was given a booth at the Sheriff Ahern’s Urban Shield training. Photo: East Bay Times: Sept. 15, 2017

**Alameda County Board of Supervisors
meeting 9:30 am, September 19, 2023
(Action: Speak in person, online,
and/or by written comment.)**

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors is expected to act on **Sheriff Oversight** at their September 19th, Regular Meeting. **Tell the Board we must have independent Sheriff Oversight!**

Link to access meeting:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/98271491041>

How you can speak: The Board takes Public Comment near the start of the meeting on any item on the agenda (other than time certain matters). **Logon by 9:30 am** and select "raise your hand". You will then be in a queue to be called upon to unmute yourself and **speak for 2 minutes.**

Talking points: Community members at multiple town halls expressed near unanimous support for the following principles, yet Supervisors Miley and Haubert have opposed this consensus:

- Legal counsel for an oversight body **must be** independent of the Office of the County Counsel which is required by law to represent the Sheriff. County Counsel cannot represent both parties and maintain independent oversight.
- Inclusion of retired police officers on a police oversight body is inconsistent with **community** oversight and could block effective oversight.
- The City of Dublin contracts with the Sheriff's Office for traffic and criminal enforcement. Thus, they have their own oversight by virtue of their contract. Dublin should not have a reserved seat and greater control than any other community.

Can't attend? Email written comments to the Board by 3:00 pm, Monday Sept, 18: cbs@acgov.org

Town Hall with District Attorney Pamela Price: Pursuing Justice in Alameda County

**Wednesday, Sept. 13th, 6:30 - 8:00 pm
Via Zoom, or in person at Niles Discovery Church, 36600 Niles Blvd., Fremont**

The voters of Alameda County elected Pamela Price for District Attorney on a platform to reform the criminal legal system, oversee the prosecution of criminal violations, and protect victims' rights. After 8 months in office, how is it going? To find out, join us for A Town Hall with Alameda County District Attorney, Pamela Price. **Register [here](#).**



Moderated by Yoel Haile, Director of the Criminal Justice program of the ACLU Northern CA, this event is organized by Faith in Action East Bay and the Interfaith Coalition for Justice in our Jails. Please help us distribute the DA Town hall [flier](#) to anyone who might benefit from this conversation with DA Price!

Letters

In August the East Bay Times and Mercury News published the following letters written by ICJJ congregants:

Redirect resources from jail to community by Richard Speiglman

Re: "[Inside a 'nightmare' lockdown at a Wisconsin prison](https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2023/08/22/letters-1379/)"
<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2023/08/22/letters-1379/>
www.mercurynews.com/2023/08/22/letters-1379/

Keep spotlight on Santa Rita Jail deaths

Re: "[Lawmakers seek jail death transparency](https://www.mercurynews.com/2023/08/18/letters-1374/)"
<https://www.mercurynews.com/2023/08/18/letters-1374/>
<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2023/08/18/letters-1374/>

Thinking of writing a letter?

ICJJ's help is available. Please contact Liz of the ICJJ Media Committee at lizkatznov@gmail.com.