

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

May 21, 2013

The County is currently considering the Replacement Central Jail Project, a \$933 million plan to rebuild Men’s Central Jail (MCJ) in order to consolidate and more effectively manage the County’s existing high-security population, comply with legal requirements, address the deteriorating condition and inefficiencies of MCJ, and optimize available beds in the County’s jail system.

In that a large number of our inmates suffer from mental illness, another, more appropriate option may be available. Law enforcement agencies have unfortunately become the caretakers of last resort for many of these mentally ill individuals. As Sheriff Baca has stated many times, the Los Angeles County jail system has become the largest de facto mental hospital in the nation. Worse, many of these individuals are found to be substance dependent. Sheriffs’ officials estimate that as many as 60 to 70% of all L.A. County inmates are drug abusers.

Our jails are not designed to effectively house and treat these inmates; Jail beds designated specifically for mentally ill or dual-diagnosed prisoners are too few in number, such that inmates who suffer from these illnesses may be placed within the

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general jail population. General jail housing, in turn, is traditionally constructed to deliver detention, not treatment. While these inmates are served by dedicated mental health and substance abuse professionals, even the most modern jail configurations have intrinsic constraints that are incompatible with a therapeutic environment. Additionally, while some mentally ill inmates benefit from interaction with cellmates, others are not suited to such arrangements and must be kept isolated from others. In order to safely accommodate these individuals, the Sheriff must on occasion place one person in a two-person cell. This has the effect of reducing jail capacity to the detriment of the entire system.

Finally, while traditional jail construction includes a hospital or infirmary unit, we have today many inmates who suffer from medical or developmental conditions requiring a lower level of medical attention and, frequently, segregation from other inmates. This includes diabetics, inmates on dialysis, inmates suffering from MRSA, and inmates with developmental and physical disabilities, among other categories.

Instead of demolishing all of MCJ and constructing a replacement facility for the general inmate population, a better approach could be to demolish one tower of MCJ and replace it with a medical/mental health/substance abuse Integrated Inmate Treatment Center designed to serve inmates with mental illness, co-occurring substance abuse and specified medical conditions. Initial studies show that by consolidating all relevant inmates in this Center, sufficient beds would be opened up elsewhere in the system to house the County's remaining inmates. The proposed Integrated Inmate Treatment Center would be designed to meet the needs of this inmate population and could result in better and more humane outcomes for these

prisoners as well as a more cost-effective solution to the problem of housing the general jail population.

Initial reviews of this idea show great promise. Studies show that recidivism on the part of mentally ill/dually-diagnosed inmates can be substantially reduced through intensive treatment programs. A specialized mental illness treatment center may help to relieve overcrowding in the system by offering a speedy alternative to the time-consuming “competency” process for mentally-ill arrestees. The State of California is already moving in this direction, and will soon open a facility in Stockton for 1700 prisoners with medical conditions or mental illness. State grant funding through SB 1022, the Public Safety Facilities Trailer Bill of 2012, may be available to help meet the capital costs of this project. Finally, by appropriately licensing the new facility, it may be possible to secure MediCal funding to cover the cost of treatment for many of these individuals for whom the County must now expend General Funds.

Before massive amounts of money are spent to build the proposed Replacement Central Jail Project, the Board should explore the possibility of creating a new type of facility that will better serve the mental health, substance abuse and medical condition needs of our inmate population.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors conduct an analysis of an alternative concept for the replacement of Men’s Central Jail, such concept to consist of the replacement of at least one tower (the Old Men’s Central Jail Tower) with a medical/mental health/substance abuse Integrated Inmate Treatment Center which would house all mentally ill inmates, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders, as well as inmates suffering from medical conditions that require segregation;

such concept to include the possible dispersion of general-population inmates now resident in the Old MCJ Tower into newly-opened jail beds throughout the system; and

I FURTHER MOVE that the Board accomplish this goal by directing the Executive Officer to amend the consultant contract with Vanir Construction Management, Inc. to include analysis of this concept, and that Vanir be directed to perform this analysis in conjunction with the County Departments of Sheriff, Mental Health, and with subject matter sub-consultants as necessary.

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