

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS LINDSEY P. HORVATH AND
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June 25, 2024

**Report on Conditions at Men’s Central Jail, Reaffirm the County’s Commitment to
Care, and Respond to Support Those in Our Care**

On May 10, 2024, the Sybil Brand Commission (SBC) commissioners visited Men’s Central Jail (MCJ) to conduct an unannounced inspection. The conditions described in the resulting inspection report¹, as highlighted by the Los Angeles Times², are beyond horrific.

Specifically, in a module generally used to house those who have engaged in assaultive or disruptive conduct, commissioners identified a dungeon-like atmosphere with motion-operated lights that did not work, trash “over all the hallways,” and conditions described as “extremely hot and humid,” with showers “continuously on,” and mattresses

¹ Sybil Brand Commission. *Men’s Central Jail (MCJ), Inspection Report*. 10 May 2024, file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/commissionpublications/report/1161835_051024_MCJInspectionReport_Narrative_Miller_Broder.pdf. Accessed 9 June 2024.

² Blakinger, Keri. *Inmate Hung a Noose. Jailers Too Busy Watching “Explicit Video” to Intervene, Inspectors Say*. Los Angeles Times, 5 June 2024, www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-06-05/an-inmate-hung-up-a-noose-jailers-were-too-busy-watching-explicit-video-to-intervene-report-says. Accessed 9 June 2024.

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that were not up to standards. Nor were there any books, or grievance forms, and many complained their personal property was not transferred from other locations.

When interviewing those in custody, the commissioners observed Sheriff's Deputies conducting "safety checks," the purpose of which is to ensure that those in custody are alive and well, and not in any immediate mental or medical health need. Here though, after watching a Deputy walk by during the safety check, the SBC commissioners observed an open cell door that had a "self-constructed noose hanging from the ceiling," in a cell belonging to a person who was in the shower. In the commissioners' words, "the noose was obvious to anyone looking into the cell and its presence was consistent with" suicidal ideation. When the commissioners went to the Deputies' work booth to report the noose, they found eight Deputies "sitting in the main office . . . watching a video on a large screen television." The Deputies "said they would check on the cell later but remained seated watching the video." The commissioners continued their inspection and, when they returned, "they discovered that the eight seated Deputies were in fact watching a sexually explicit video on their wide-screen television." To make matters worse, the Deputies did not stop watching the video. Instead, they only turned off the video when a female SBC commissioner entered the office. The report notes that there "was also a stack of about eight videos next to the computer monitor." The commissioners were eventually able to speak with the Safety Check Deputy who "pulled down the noose but threw it on the floor outside [the] cell." Per the report, "[w]hen the commissioners requested additional mental health support and for [the person's] suicidal ideation to be taken seriously, the Deputy shrugged the request off." Additionally, the commissioner

described the deputies' booth in this module as featuring stickers, including a "Gadsden Flag" (favored by right-wing activists) and an anti-President Biden sticker.

While the conditions experienced by this person were horrific, they were not the only instance highlighting the poor condition of MCJ and the failures to lessen the severity of those conditions. Amongst the neglect and/or conditions either directly observed by the commissioners or detailed by detainees were:

- broken toilets in cells;
- mold and mildew in several places;
- rats and cockroaches in cells;
- missing eyeglasses;
- missed medical appointments;
- failures to contact consulates for foreign nationals;
- detainees in need of immediate medical care;
- non-functioning cell doors putting both those in custody and staff at risk;
- hunger due to inadequate or spoiled food;
- flooding resulting from plumbing issues;
- dirty, bug-infested sink water;
- shortage of grievance forms;
- insufficient and broken cleaning supplies; and
- transgender individuals reported not being provided appropriate clothing.

These reports confirm, yet again, that conditions at Men's Central Jail are unacceptable and inhumane. On April 9, 2024, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted

*Empowering the Jail Closure Implementation Team*³ (Horvath-Solis), reiterating the need for a plan to close MCJ because of repeated findings of its poor and unacceptable conditions. Moreover, the Sybil Brand Commission report raises further questions regarding staff culture and their ability to perform basic functions. Lack of attentiveness to safety checks, callous attitudes toward detainees' mental and physical health, and their lack of honesty and urgency in reporting incidents and concerns to supervisors exacerbates the already derelict conditions. The report provides additional context and raises questions about whether staff – who openly display stickers reflecting societal divides, often called “culture wars,” while working in County-owned and operated offices and buildings, as well as other behaviors in offices tasked with providing safety and security to all of those in custody – can be trusted to appropriately care for all the individuals entrusted to them.

Indeed, the May 10, 2024 SBC report is not the only recent publication from an oversight body identifying Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) staff displaying concerning stickers in public places. A recent quarterly report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) noted several concerning incidents, including the discovery of a sticker with the Regulators' logo, a deputy gang affiliated with the Century Sheriff's Station, in the entryway to an elevator entrance in the staff parking structure at the adjacent Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF).⁴ It is worth noting that the reported

³ Horvath, Lindsey P., and Hilda L. Solis. *Empowering the Jail Closure Implementation Team*. 9 Apr. 2024, file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/190258.pdf. Accessed 9 June 2024.

⁴ Office of the Inspector General. *Reform and Oversight Efforts: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department - October to December 2023*. 20 Feb. 2024, <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/431627bf-2e3d-4e27-b83b-1c8b744c7be0/Reform%20and%20Oversight%20Efforts%20-%20Los%20Angeles%20County%20Sheriff%27s%20Department%20-%20October%20to%20December%202023%20and%20Attachments.pdf>. Accessed 9 June 2024.

sticker was present for an extended period of time before the election of the current Sheriff.

While LASD has noted it continues to experience significant staffing shortages at the Sergeant and Lieutenant levels, the persistence of these problems suggests they are not solely a result of limited supervision. The problems speak to a deeply embedded culture where staff have become desensitized and even unresponsive to concerning behavior. This lack of regard continues despite those in our custody needing significant, supportive care to safely return to our communities. In the least, we owe these individuals an obligation to return them to their communities and loved ones in no worse condition than when they entered our justice system. As our region's safety net, it is incumbent on those employed by the County to, at the very minimum, recognize the humanity of those in our care and treat all individuals with dignity.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Request the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department report back in writing to the Board in 30 days, with a detailed description of the following:
 - a. Systemic or strategic changes the Department is implementing to ensure appropriate care for those in segregated housing, serving discipline for misconduct, and other specialized populations where individuals may be at higher risk for self-injurious behavior or other crisis-type incidents;
 - b. Actions taken to support staff in their commitment to respond to crisis situations, including responding to, addressing, and understanding signs of suicidal ideations and other medical crisis situations; and

- c. The Department's evaluation of opportunities to address ongoing challenges to providing better care for those in custody, while simultaneously providing staff with sufficient resources, and collaboration from other Departments, to appropriately respond to the wide array of crisis situations confronted in custody on a regular basis.
2. Direct that the Sybil Brand Commission, the Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission, the Chief Executive Office-Jail Closure Implementation Team and DOJ Compliance Unit, Department of Health Service-Correctional Health Services, the Justice, Care and Opportunities Department, and any other relevant departments, and request that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, provide a verbal report back to the Board at the July 30, 2024, Policy Presentations and Closed Session Board meeting, to report on the following:
 - a. Ongoing conditions in Men's Central Jail, including the availability of mental health care for crisis needs and regularly scheduled treatment;
 - b. The availability of programming for mental health, recreational, and other resources designed to improve the mental health care and well-being of those in custody at Men's Central Jail; and
 - c. Efforts underway to expand mental health treatment and improve medical crisis responses, including those related to suicidal ideation.
3. Request that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department report back in writing in 30 days on disciplinary consequences to staff for the types of conduct observed by the Sybil Brand Commissioners, if confirmed,

including watching sexually explicit or other non-work-related videos in the workplace, failing to promptly and appropriately respond to suicidal ideation, and/or failing to notify a supervisor as appropriate.

4. Request that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department report back in writing in 30 days and explain its current policies on political, cultural, and other types of politicking, promotion, or marketing in work locations, and what the Department is doing to ensure staff comply with those policies.

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