

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

September 24, 2024

Support Proposition 6: Eliminate Involuntary Servitude for Incarcerated People

Proposition (Prop) 6, on the November 5, 2024, California general election ballot, amends the California Constitution to remove the current provision that allows jails and prisons to impose involuntary servitude to punish crime (*i.e.*, forcing incarcerated persons to work). Prop 6 ends slavery in California and upholds human rights and dignity for everyone. It replaces carceral involuntary servitude with voluntary work programs, has bipartisan support, and aligns with national efforts to reform the 13th Amendment. It will prioritize rehabilitation, thereby lowering recidivism.

The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, while abolishing slavery, includes a loophole that allows forced labor as punishment for those convicted of crimes. Prop 6 aims to close this loophole at the State level, making California a leader in protecting the human rights of incarcerated individuals. Involuntary servitude violates basic principles of human dignity and freedom.

By supporting Prop 6, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) will continue to advocate for a justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation, education, and

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preparation for reentry into society. With Prop 6, work programs in prisons can still exist, but they should be voluntary, fairly compensated, and geared toward helping individuals develop skills that will assist them after their release. Forced labor contradicts the very idea of justice reform and eliminating it will ensure that California's justice system remains focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Forced labor is a policy rooted in racism. After the abolition of slavery, laws criminalized freed African Americans who were unemployed, unhoused, and poverty stricken given years of chattel slavery, leading to their imprisonment and exploitation through forced labor—essentially continuing slavery under a different name. This legacy persists today, with people of color, particularly Black and Latino communities, overrepresented in the prison population and disproportionately affected by forced labor policies. We must dismantle the remaining vestiges of institutional racism.

Requiring incarcerated individuals to work without pay or for well below minimum wage is not just a moral issue; it's also an economic one. Incarcerated persons are often paid cents per hour for their labor, creating a system that unfairly benefits the State and private corporations at the expense of human rights. This dynamic not only exploits the labor of incarcerated people but also creates a deeply unequal economic structure. Support of Prop 6 means advocating for fair labor practices and ensuring that all workers, including those incarcerated, have the right to be fairly compensated for their labor. Voluntary, compensated work in prisons can help individuals develop skills and earn wages that can support them after their release, reducing recidivism and promoting economic stability for them and their families. Prop 6, advances human rights and meaningful justice reform, in line with the priorities of the Board.

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I THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors take an official position to support Proposition 6, on the November 5, 2024, California general election ballot, which would amend the California Constitution to state that involuntary servitude cannot be allowed as punishment for crime and forbid state prisons from disciplining people in prison who refuse to work.

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(CT/NR)