

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

Prioritizing Dignity and Life in the Los Angeles County Jails

This year is becoming one of the deadliest years for people incarcerated in the Los Angeles County (County) jails. In the first 14 weeks of the year, 16 incarcerated people died, including three in one day – that’s twice the number of deaths in the same amount of time last year.

Many people who are coming into the jails are largely sicker than the general population or come in with undiagnosed health conditions, as they may not have had consistent access to primary healthcare, have untreated mental health needs, or are non-compliant with their medication. Illegal substances, that are more potent and deadlier than ever, continue to infiltrate the jails, leading to more overdoses and substance-related deaths, which poses an increased risk, especially for those who are incarcerated and have substance use dependencies. According to Vera, “...63 percent of people serving sentences in jails met the criteria for a substance use disorder.”¹

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board), in prioritizing the multitude of lawsuits and consent decrees regarding conditions of confinement; overcrowding; and improving mental health services in the jails, have increased the number of medical and

¹ <https://www.vera.org/publications/overdose-deaths-and-jail-incarceration/national-trends-and-racial-disparities>

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mental health staff to help fill vacancies and address the need for more mental health programming. The Board has also ensured that opioid antagonists, like Narcan, are readily accessible to people who are incarcerated to help overturn deadly overdoses. Throughout the jails, there are vending machines filled with Narcan that can be accessed for free and Narcan dosages are hung inside the jail modules and pods so that people who are incarcerated and utilizing drugs do not have to rely on intervention or assistance from custody deputies should they or someone else require help.

Despite having a historically lower jail population, an increased number of staffing, and additional supports, the number of deaths continue to go up, not down. The issue of deaths in the jails are not new to the County and it is time that we fully and comprehensively understand the factors leading to the increase in deaths and do what is needed to prevent further deaths, even more so with urgency given the known state and federal reductions and cuts related to medical care and services.

The County must prioritize dignity and life in the County jails for the thousands who are incarcerated.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Health Services' Correctional Health Services (CHS) and request the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) to submit a report back in writing in 90 days; present, no later than two weeks after the submission of the report back, at a joint Public Safety and Health and Mental Health Services Cluster; and present, no later than two weeks after the joint Cluster presentation, to the Board of Supervisors meeting on the following:
 - a. Implementation plan with key performance indicators and metrics to assess progress made to significantly decrease the number of deaths in the jails;

- b. Analysis on the causes and factors leading to the increased number of deaths and how they will be resolved and addressed to prevent and decrease in-custody deaths, including providing recommendations and best practices; and
- c. Analysis of any local, state, or federal policy or budgetary decisions that will impact the level of service and treatment that could lead to an increase of in-custody deaths, such as Proposition 36, federal cuts to public health and health services, and others.

I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Auditor-Controller and CEO Risk Management, with support from CHS, LASD, and Medical Examiner, in consultation with County Counsel, to:
 - a. Audit and evaluate the corrective action plans related to in-custody deaths from the past five years (2020-present) and provide any additional recommendations for CHS and LASD to improve and address the increased number of deaths; and
 - b. Provide the Board with a separate report back, in writing, in 90 days.

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