

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

AGN. NO.
December 2, 2025

Speeding Up and Expanding Family Reunification Programming at the Century Regional Detention Facility

The incarceration of women in the United States has grown rapidly over the past few decades – between 1980 and 2022, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 585%, from 26,326 in 1980 to 180,684 in 2022.¹ While incarceration inevitably has detrimental effects on the wellbeing of the women who are detained in jails and prisons, it also has a devastating impact on their families, and especially their children. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, more than 58 percent of women in state and federal prison, and nearly 80 percent of women in local jails, have children who are minors.² Having a parent who is incarcerated often forces children to face the immediate threat of poverty due to a lack of stable housing and parental income. Children with an incarcerated parent often face psychological challenges, socio-behavioral challenges, many experience suspension or expulsion from school, and some resort to criminal activity to survive.³ A recent study from the University of California, Irvine, claimed that the absence of a parent due to incarceration can be so damaging that parental incarceration may be more detrimental to a child's well-being than experiencing parental

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>

² <https://www.vera.org/news/more-than-5-million-children-have-had-an-incarcerated-parent>

³ <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hidden-consequences-impact-incarceration-dependent-children>

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death or divorce.⁴

Family reunification programming at prisons and jails are critical in reducing the impacts of incarceration on the family unit. Studies like one from the Council of State Government's Justice Center found that child-friendly visiting programs provide opportunities for incarcerated parents to spend quality family time with their children, helping to develop and maintain healthy parent-child attachments, reducing a child's feeling of abandonment, and preserving a sense of belonging as part of a family.⁵ Positive family relationships during incarceration can also help reduce recidivism and improve an individual's likelihood of finding and keeping a job after incarceration.

Currently, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department's Bonding, Empowering, and Reuniting (BEAR) Families Program provides a pathway for incarcerated women at the Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF) to reunify with their children in a child-friendly setting that is conducive to family bonding. This program is offered to women housed in Gender Responsive Services (GRS) education modules and in the inmate worker module at CRDF. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the BEAR program shifted online but recently resumed in person in a small room on the CRDF campus. The room is colorful and warm, with play mats, children's books, and activities and toys so the mothers can step out of a carceral setting into a space that will allow them to play with, read to, and bond with their children. However, currently, only a limited number of women can participate in the BEAR program. There are more women who would like to participate but are unable to because the current space is small and, more consequentially, it is located outside of the facility's

⁴ <https://www.socsci.uci.edu/newsevents/news/2014/2014-08-16-parental-incarceration-can-be-worse-for-a-child-than-divorc.php>

⁵ <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/evidence-based-promising-programs-practices-support-parents-incarcerated/>

security area, which means there are limits to who can access the program due to the need for a significant number of Sheriff's deputies to be present in order to mitigate security risks. To allow more women to participate, there needs to be a larger, more secure space made available for the program.

Fortunately, there is an opportunity to expand the program's space and capacity so that more mothers at CRDF can participate in this valuable family bonding program. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, CDRF was co-located with the California Superior Court and had an operating courtroom on the grounds. The courtroom has since been closed, and the space has been transferred to the custody of the County. This space is located within the facility's security perimeter, meaning there is a secure way for women to move from CRDF housing units to the courtroom space with minimal security risk. Additionally, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) received a grant from the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2018 in the amount of about \$750,000 for the purpose of creating a secure space for the BEAR Program and purchasing equipment to revitalize the courtroom space. These funds were used to purchase supplies, equipment, decorations, and program curriculum with the goal of revitalizing the courtroom space for the BEAR program. The Gender Responsive Services unit at LASD has identified the courtroom to be a good location to expand contact visiting through the BEAR program at CRDF and has been working since the courtroom was acquired by the County to move forward with renovating the space. However, despite having all the supplies needed to move forward, progress has stalled for unknown reasons.

The County should take advantage of this unused room that is County owned, secure, and has equipment already purchased using grant funding, by converting it into a larger-scale family bonding space. This would allow more women to participate in the

BEAR program so they can reunite with their children and continue to develop healthy parent-child relationships, minimizing the various adverse impacts of incarceration on both the mother and child's life.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors request the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) - Gender Responsive Services unit, LASD - Facilities Planning Bureau, and LASD - Facilities Services Bureau, in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office Real Estate Division, to report back in writing in 45 days, and every 60 days thereafter until the completion of the project, with a plan and timeline on hosting the Bonding, Empowering, and Reuniting (BEAR) Families Program in the unused former Los Angeles Superior Court courtroom on the Century Regional Detention Facility campus. The plan should include all relevant costs to renovate the courtroom, any potential ongoing costs, funding options to pay for the costs including what has already been funded by the DOJ grant, and a timeline for the renovations.

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JH:kc/ap