

**REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN**

AGN. NO.  
February 3, 2025

**Addressing Water Quality and Safety and Other Hazardous Environmental Issues  
in the Los Angeles County Jails**

Since last year, the Sybil Brand Commission (SBC), tasked with inspecting the Los Angeles County (County) jails, have reported on the poor water quality and safety issues at Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF). During their inspections, they observed brown, rust-colored water coming out of the faucets, “off” smells, and have seen worms coming out of the pipes. SBC commissioners have also taken photos of the brown water collected in water bottles that was taken directly from the sinks at CRDF.

Incarcerated people at CRDF and at the other jails have expressed discomfort with having to drink water from the tap that are in their housing units and cells. Though there is an ability to purchase bottled water from the commissary, the amount of water is limited to 100 ounces a week and only those who have funds in their accounts would be able to purchase bottled water. People who are pregnant are provided bottled water, however, once they give birth, they go back to drinking either tap water or must purchase bottled water if they have the funds.

Staff who work at the jails have shared their disgust for the water and do not drink it, rather, they bring their own, however, they are not limited in how much they can bring, like those who are incarcerated.

**MOTION**

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In SBC's June 2025 inspection report, they noted that they "spoke to several women and their cells, and they showed the bugs that come out of the sink. They have to use tampons to plug the hole and stop the bugs from coming out. They showed one of such tampons to the commissioners, and you could see the little black bugs that come through the water. They also reported that worms are in the water." In their August 2025 report, they noted that there was brown water spillage and flies around the pooled water. They also reported the incarcerated people seeing "visible worms, maggots, and small flies in sinks."

Back in 2024, the Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission (COC) has also requested responses of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) about the water quality but also lack of water concerns. LASD did respond that they water testing has been done back in 2022 and that when water is shut off, they provide "access to drinking water in Cambro beverage dispensers or bottled water".

Unfortunately, issues with water quality and safety are not a 2025 problem, rather one that has been going on for decades. The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California (ACLU SoCal), the designated court monitor for the 1975 *Rutherford* lawsuit has for years made complaints about the poor plumbing and water issues, including brown water seeping out of sinks, pipes, and spillage on the floors. Additionally, in the September 2025 California Department of Justice lawsuit, they cite "uninhabitable conditions, including lack of clean water, as unconstitutional."

Though the Department of Public Health has gone out and tested the water conditions, as recent as December 2025, the problems reported by people who are incarcerated persist and the entities who conduct inspections of the jails continue to share serious concerns about the water quality.

There are other environmental issues and concerns related to the jails and prisons across the country, aside from just water quality. In July 2024, Massachusetts's Senator Edward J. Markey introduced his "Environmental Health in Prisons Act" to be used as a tool to "improve the environmental health outcomes of incarcerated people and carceral facility workers."<sup>1</sup> It behooves the County to also take a step in identifying what those local issues are and addressing them in a timely manner.

Residents in the County, including those who are incarcerated, should have access to clean water to drink and cleanse in and the water conditions in the jails are well-below standards of public health and safety. The County must mitigate these issues to prevent further issues of harm.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Request the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, in collaboration with ~~Direct the~~ Department of Public Health and Sybil Brand Commission, in collaboration with the ~~Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department~~, to address, mitigate, and resolve the water quality and safety issues presented in all County jails within 180 days or earlier; and 60 days after resolution, provide the Board of Supervisors with a report back, in writing, on the steps taken to resolve the immediate issues and a plan to address any future water quality and safety concerns.
2. Until the water quality and safety issues are addressed and resolved, as stated in Directive 1, request the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to provide all people who are incarcerated with access to bottled water or clean potable water, especially those with medical or other needs, immediately.
3. Direct the Sybil Brand Commission to continue inspecting water quality and safety

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<sup>1</sup> [Senator Markey, Rep. Pressley Introduce Environmental Health in Prisons Act](#)

issues at the jails and provide a monthly update on the progress of Directive 1 in their reports, until completion.

4. Request the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department to conduct a thorough infrastructure assessment to identify water quality cause, including meeting with the local water agencies, with assistance of the Department of Public Health, to improve water quality in the LA County jails, along with implementing other recommendations and best practices and cost analyses.
5. Direct the Department of Public Health to conduct a survey of the water quality testing results from the water purveyors supporting all the County jails for the past five years to identify any water quality issues in the water supply; assess, within its existing authority and currently available resources, any additional actions or support the Department can provide to strengthen oversight and ensure safe and reliable drinking water in these facilities, and report back findings to the Board, in writing, in 90 days.

**I, FURTHER, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Sybil Brand Commission to provide the Board of Supervisors with a report back, in writing, in 120 days, noting other environmental issues and hazards they observed during their inspections and complaints received by people who are incarcerated in the Los Angeles County jails, along with recommendations to address and resolve.

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