



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2020

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Board Approves Cortese's Request to Suspend Jail Construction and Consider Building a Mental Health Center

With an emphasis on providing treatment for mentally ill inmates in the Santa Clara County jail system, the Board of Supervisors today unanimously approved Supervisor Dave Cortese's request that construction of the new jail facility replacing the old Main Jail South be suspended. Instead, the Board has agreed to move forward with a potential mental health treatment center overseen by the Public Health Department and staffed by the County's Behavioral Health Department.

Supervisor Cortese's request first came during a report in August 2020 from administration on replacement of the Main Jail South, which has been demolished to make way for a new facility with a focus on treatment and programming. Today, Supervisor Cortese requested that before the County move forward with the project, consideration be given to a design that would "right size and configure" the facility to focus on treatment and rehabilitation rather than incarceration.

"At its core, the new facility should center on care first, jail last," said Supervisor Cortese. "With a low jail population caused by COVID-19 prevention and the growing need for mental health services, the County has the

opportunity to re-envision how inmates are treated while in custody and, more importantly, how they can be diverted from custody in the first place. It would not be wise to go forward with the original scope of the new Main Jail South under a shift that focuses on rehabilitation instead of incarceration.”

With the vote, Administration was directed to:

- Suspend RFP actions for the replacement Main Jail South facility under its current scope of work until the Board can provide new direction.
- Return to the Board on November 17 with information on the existing inmate population, where they are housed, the number of inmates with diagnosed mental health illnesses, the number of inmates that could be best served through outpatient or residential treatment or permanent supportive housing, and how many would still need to be housed in a more restrictive setting.
- Provide a report on inmate population projections between now and the next five years, and evaluate the success of having an estimated 1,000 in-custody inmates released back into the community under supervision in response to COVID-19.

Supervisor Cortese established a Blue Ribbon Commission to assess custody operations after the death of Michael Tyree in custody, which led to dozens of recommendations to improve the treatment of inmates. At the August 21, 2020 Budget Hearing, Supervisor Cortese also asked for options that would designate the new Main Jail South as a Behavioral Health Center to house inmates with severe mental health needs.

To listen to the discussion at the Tuesday meeting, [click here](#) and scroll to Item 10. For more information, contact the Office of Supervisor Cortese at 408-299-5030.

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