

Written Comment submitted by Chris Rasmussen (chris@namisanmateo.org)

July 10, 2024

Dear Independent Civilian Advisory Commission on the Sheriff's Office,

NAMI San Mateo County and the NAMI Advocacy Committee are deeply concerned about the recent deaths at Maguire Jail, where five individuals have died since January 2023. Based on available information, it appears that two of these deaths were suicides, and two were drug-related.

We urge the Independent Civilian Advisory Commission (ICAC) on the Sheriff's Office to initiate an independent review of these deaths to identify preventive measures for future incidents. Additionally, we ask the commission to request the Board of Supervisors convene experts to study best practices and develop and fund enhanced diversion services to save lives.

Sheriff Christina Corpus has noted that approximately 70% of individuals booked into San Mateo County's Maguire Correctional Facility are addicted to alcohol or drugs, and around 48% have a mental illness. Two-thirds of all incarcerated individuals leave the facility within five days. These percentages have been rising in recent years.

(Source: One year later – how the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office is going beyond the call to help incarcerated persons overcome addiction, mental illness <https://www.smcgov.org/ceo/news/one-year-later-how-san-mateo-county-sheriffs-office-going-beyond-call-help-incarcerated>)

While the sheriff has strengthened mental health and substance abuse services within the jail, these units, staffed with some medical personnel, still function within the correctional environment. Correctional officers and deputies are not trained to handle addiction and mental health crises, despite the long-standing use of jails and prisons as de facto mental health institutions. This practice is ineffective, inhumane, and financially wasteful.

We need more community resources to offer safe and effective diversion. The Behavioral Health Commission has recommended a 24-hour drop-in crisis center as an alternative to jail when appropriate and NAMI San Mateo County supports this recommendation.

https://www.smchealth.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mh_reco0711.pdf?1660753816

With the implementation of the new crisis response system through a contract for a Mobile Crisis Response Team with Telecare, we have the opportunity to lead the way in saving lives by planning and building a more robust diversion capacity. <https://www.smcgov.org/ceo/news/county-launches-mobile-mental-health-crisis-response>

Deaths in jails are increasing statewide, with suicides being the second most common cause (Source: California jails are holding thousands fewer people, but far more are dying in them <https://calmatters.org/justice/2024/03/death-in-california-jails/?series=california-jails-inmate-deaths>).

Research shows that mental health conditions worsen in jail settings, which are not designed for treatment. As the California Budget and Policy Center has stated, "While California must continue to improve health care for people who are incarcerated, reforms are also needed to address the connections between mental health and the criminal justice system so that Californians who need mental health treatment receive the appropriate care in a timely manner rather than being confined in state prisons or county jails" (Source: Many Californians in Prisons and Jails Have Mental Health Needs <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/prisons-and-jails-have-mental-health-needs/>).

Those under the influence of drugs may act out violently and be subject to arrest, but jail is not a suitable environment for drug treatment. Detoxification is a medically risky process that should occur in a clinical facility, not a jail. In 2019, NPR reported that “About 80% of all detoxification for drugs and alcohol happens in jails and prisons. And nationally, in the last 10 years, counties and states have paid out well over \$70 million for addiction withdrawal-related deaths of inmates” (Source: County Jails Struggle With A New Role As America's Prime Centers For Opioid Detox <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/24/716398909/county-jails-struggle-with-a-new-role-as-americas-prime-centers-for-opioid-detox>).

The deaths in the county jail, all involved individuals housed at Maguire Jail who were booked but not tried or convicted, have raised significant questions and should prompt an independent review. Key concerns include whether different treatment options could have saved lives, such as immediate medical assessments at a secure substance treatment facility, screening for mental health crises, or intervention by an unarmed crisis response team. The circumstances of their arrests, potential for medical evaluations to reveal critical illnesses, and the adequacy of suicide risk screenings are under scrutiny. A review would aim to identify lessons and improvements to prevent future deaths in custody.

We strongly advocate for the development of safe and secure medical facilities to manage these challenging cases in a clinical setting by trained professionals in mental health and substance abuse. This approach will not only save lives but also ensure that resources are used effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Rasmussen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Rasmussen, President

NAMI San Mateo County

Chris@namisanmateo.org

Information obtained from Fixin' San Mateo

What is a life worth?

Who are the people who have died and why? All of them were people who had been booked but not tried or convicted, and thus were presumed innocent under the law. They were all housed at Maguire Jail.

Maycarla Sulapas, a 25 year old mother from South San Francisco, died January 7, 2023 of acute drug intoxication with lethal levels of methamphetamine in her system. She had been arrested for her allegedly violent attacks on a relative, as well as acting erratically including being naked in the street, and was taken to the hospital, cleared medically to be booked into jail, and transported to the jail, then back to a medical facility where she died. [San Mateo County District Attorney's Office concludes in-custody death investigation](#)

Peter Edward McLaughlin, a 64 year old from Pacifica, died October 20, 2023 from undiagnosed brain cancer. He had been arrested for threatening with a firearm, a misdemeanor. His neighbor said in a personal communication that he had been increasingly hostile and erratic. www.smcsheriff.com/sites/default/files/articles/01-25-2024%20In-Custody%20Death%20Findings.pdf

Ronald Simmons, a 34 year old from San Bruno with a reported history of depression, died October 21, 2023. His death was ruled a suicide. He had been arrested for battery and making criminal threats and was housed in the behavioral health unit. [Second inmate in two days dies inside Maguire Correctional Facility in Redwood City](#)

[San Mateo County coroner identifies two inmates found dead at Maguire jail](#)

Anthony Harding, a 23 year old from Oakland, died January 14, 2023 in the drug detox unit. He was arrested for misappropriating lost property and resisting arrest.

[Inmate Dies at San Mateo County Jail Detox Unit, Triggering a Multi-Agency Investigation](#)

[CBS News, Inmate Dies Sunday in Detox Unit](#)

Hunter Bergner, a 46-year old from Redwood City, apparently died by suicide March 15, 2024. The final cause of death has not been released.

His booking charges were related to violating a protective order and possessing a firearm against a court order. He was in the general population.

https://www.smdailyjournal.com/news/local/46-year-old-man-s-death-in-jail-may-be-suicide-sheriff-says/article_c9c64454-e50b-11ee-9058-17d56c5653cf.html

Written Comment submitted by Diane Leeds (mrscanard@aol.com)

July 12th, 2024

Dear Independent Civilian Advisory Commission on the Sheriff's Office:

San Francisco Peninsula People Power (SFPPP) was organized in 2017 in response to a call from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to work locally on issues such as immigrant rights and expanding voter participation to all sectors of our community.

We are writing to ask the Independent Civilian Advisory Commission on the Sheriff's Office to support the request from Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC), a nonprofit statewide legal support center, to enter the jails, starting with Maple Street Correctional Center and its transitional housing and work furlough units, in order to provide civic education, register eligible voters, and help them vote in the November election.

Specifically, we ask that LSPC staff members, including formerly incarcerated members like Jesse Burleson, be provided permission to enter the Maple Street Correctional Center for this project with the express purpose of talking to incarcerated residents about the importance of voting and registering eligible people to vote. Permission to Mr. Burleson was denied months ago. Mr. Burleson appealed this decision but was again denied permission within a mere 24 hours.

As you likely know, eligible citizens can vote lawfully, even in jail. Yet many eligible voters in jail are not registered, and even those who are registered find it difficult to exercise the right in practice. Consequently, very few end up voting.

We think it is our duty to increase voter registration and turnout in the jails of San Mateo County. We want the Sheriff's Office to recognize the value of trusted messengers, including formerly incarcerated people, in helping currently incarcerated people understand the value of voting.

LSPC was awarded a grant from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to support its work on increasing voter registration and election turnout for persons incarcerated in the San Mateo County jails. Last summer the San Mateo County Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee (VEOAC) invited LSPC to discuss this project; San Mateo County Elections Division and Sheriff's Office staff attended the meeting. The Elections Division staff reported that only approximately 80 incarcerated people in San Mateo County were registered, compared to about 600 in the San Francisco jails which have a similarly sized population. The opportunity for improvement was recognized, and the project was expected to move forward. However, the clearance for the LSPC staff was denied. As a result, they did not register voters for the March primary. This was a huge lost opportunity. We need to move quickly to prepare for the November election.

We suggest that once the clearances to visit are approved, a meeting between SFPPP , LSPC, the San Mateo County Elections Division, and the Sheriff's Office be arranged to work out the logistics so that volunteers under the supervision of LSPC and trained by the Elections Division be permitted to conduct voter education and registration visits to Maple Street jail from August to October and, in October, visit to help people cast their ballots.

Election officials have signaled their support in principle for such efforts, provided they get approval from the Sheriff's Office. Moreover, a host of community groups support this effort and have expressed their willingness to assist in implementing the project.

Excitingly, and relatedly, the San Mateo County Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Commission (JJJPC) heard a [presentation](#) on June 25 from the Youth Law Center, which is partnering with the Probation Department to use trusted messengers and peers to enhance and support voter registration in the Youth Services Center (Juvenile Hall).

This is an opportunity for San Mateo County to lead and make history. The year 2024 can be remembered as the year that San Mateo County finally ended disenfranchisement.

Sincerely,
Diane Leeds
San Francisco Peninsula People Power

The following organizations have signed on in support of this July 12 letter from San Francisco Peninsula People Power to the Independent Civilian Advisory Commission on the Sheriff's Office:

- ACLU-North Peninsula Chapter
- Redwood City for Racial Equity
- Sisters of Mercy Solidarity Committee
- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Redwood City Social Action Committee

Written Public Comment by Jim Lawrence (jtlawrence94404@yahoo.com)

July 12, 2024

Dear Commissioners:

Our community needs a method for lodging confidential complaints with the Commission. We hope that you will work with county staff to set up a mechanism for residents to submit complaints to the Commission and receive a response.

Currently, the only complaint form available is the [Citizen Commendation and Complaint Form](#), which the Sheriff's Office maintains. The public is well aware of the lack of impartiality of a complaint process in which the Sheriff's Office examines its own conduct, and they do not trust it.

We at Fixin' San Mateo County (Fixin') have experienced this phenomenon firsthand. Fixin' is a grassroots community group dedicated to garnering support for sheriff oversight. As Fixin' has become known in the county, people have reached out with complaints about the Sheriff's Office. At San Carlos Hometown Days in May, for example, a member of a local foundation reported to Fixin' volunteers that multiple residents of color in San Carlos told him they were mistreated by Sheriff's deputies; they were afraid to report their complaints to the Sheriff's Office. Another individual told Fixin' volunteers about an incident in which he was allegedly arrested and beaten by deputies for riding his bicycle at night without a reflector. He refused to report it to the Sheriff's Office. Fixin' has also received several complaints at its general email address. We are not equipped or authorized to address such complaints. The public has complaints to lodge, and they feel safe doing so with a body they see as independent. Our community members need some recourse that is simple, impartial, and within their reach. Numerous other counties have an independent body of one kind or another that receives such complaints, and a process for doing so. Residents of this county deserve nothing less. Thank you for your attention.

Jim Lawrence

Board Chair, Fixin SMC