



# County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

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November 16, 2021

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
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Supervisor Kathryn Barger

From: Brandon T. Nichols, Executive Director *BTN*  
Jail Closure Implementation Team

## **JAIL CLOSURE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM - FIRST REPORT BACK (ITEM NO. 27, AGENDA OF JUNE 22, 2021)**

Since before 2013, the County has considered what to do with the aging facility of Men's Central Jail (MCJ) and how to better treat the people who have been incarcerated there. That year, however, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) received a report by Vanir Construction Management (Independent Review and Comprehensive Report, 2013) which recommended the closure, demolition, and replacement of MCJ. Since that report, jail closure has been the frequent focus of subsequent reviews and related recommendations, including significant reports prepared by Health Management Associates (*Los Angeles County Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility Population Analysis and Community*, 2015), Rand Corporation (*Estimating the Size of the Los Angeles County Jail Mental Health Population Appropriate for Release into Community Services*, 2020), the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) and the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) (*Men's Central Jail Closure Plan: Achieving a Care First Vision*, 2020), an "Executive Workgroup" of 15 executives and Manatt, Phelps, and Phillips, LLP (*Developing a Plan for Closing Men's Central Jail as Los Angeles County Reduces its Reliance on Incarceration*, 2020), and the JFA Institute (*Estimated Cost Savings from a Reduced Jail Population and Closure of Men's Central Jail and Jail Population Projections*, 2021).

To reconcile these reports and the many recommendations to develop the specific plans and resources needed to actually close MCJ and to drive and oversee the work of closure,

Each Supervisor  
November 16, 2021  
Page 2

your Board approved a motion on June 22, 2021, to create the Jail Closure Implementation Team (JCIT). On July 14, 2021, the Chief Executive Office (CEO) responded with a report outlining a possible preliminary structure for JCIT drawing from existing County expertise.

Your June 22, 2021 motion, directed the JCIT Executive Director to report within 60 days of becoming operational on, in relevant part, JCIT's: actions, goals and associated timelines, including an initial estimate of how long may be necessary for the closure of MCJ; and a framework for regular and transparent communications with community. This report now provides a status update on JCIT and responds to these directives.

### **JCIT Staffing**

The CEO identified and onboarded Brandon T. Nichols to serve as the Executive Director of JCIT, whose JCIT work began on September 15, 2021. Mr. Nichols has served the County for over 25 years in multiple roles including as former Chief Deputy/Acting Director of the Department of Children and Family Services and as Chief Deputy of the Probation Department. He also worked many years in the Office of the County Counsel providing strategic advice on systemic issues, including the County's Homeless Initiative and the provision of mental health services to foster youth, their families, and people who are incarcerated.

The JCIT staff now also includes Stephanie Mahdessian who has worked at the departments of Children and Family Services, Mental Health, and Probation; Gina Eachus who worked on child welfare issues and bail reform with County Counsel; and Lesley Blacher who has worked on Whole Person Care with the Department of Health Services, the Department of Public Social Services' "Linkages" program, the County's Homeless Initiative, and who also worked at the Department of Mental Health. The work of JCIT is being further supported by the Department of Mental Health who is dedicating John Franklin Sierra who most recently worked to develop and implement the Alternative Crisis Response System to serve part time as part of the JCIT team. Collectively, the JCIT staff have worked extensively in the areas of law, justice reform, mental health, health services, homeless services, and child welfare while with the County.

### **Goals, Actions, and Initial Timeline**

As directed by your Board in the June 22, 2021 motion, the goal of JCIT is to depopulate MCJ to the point where the facility can be closed and demolished without constructing new jail facilities including jail-like "treatment centers." JCIT is currently working to harmonize and streamline the many previous studies and recommendations into a core

set of concrete strategies which will directly lead to that closure. Those strategies will require categorizing the needs of the existing population, designing a pathway for each category of need, and linking to or contracting for resources to meet those needs in an alternative setting. Those resources must better support the people released from jail and avoid a cycle of harm and recidivism, while also maintaining public safety. Further, significantly expanded mental health resources and robust diversion and incarceration-alternative programs must also be in place to ensure that jail depopulation is not a futile endeavor, and that emptied jail space remains unused.

At this point, it is difficult to accurately predict how long it will take to reach this goal. Earlier estimates of a workgroup chaired by LASD and ODR were that similar efforts would take approximately 24 months. The proposed timeline assumes perfect design, implementation, and cooperation between all stakeholders, including the Los Angeles Superior Court. A recent report by the JFA Institute suggested that the task is more challenging and will likely take longer. That said, JCIT is confident that depopulation efforts can begin immediately, and we will provide updated and more accurate timeframes to your Board in our quarterly reports as the impact of those efforts becomes evident.

I am happy to report that JCIT is already taking steps to begin depopulation and provide some immediate relief. Specifically, JCIT recently facilitated a meeting with LASD and State representatives, including the secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, and obtained a commitment by the State to target the transfer of as many as 400 people a week out of County custody to the State and to establish a local program of State parole to effectuate the release of prisoners directly from County jails to community programs. Since that meeting, 955 have been transferred, resulting in a 35 percent decrease in that population.

Additionally, JCIT is working with ODR to potentially fund maternal health and other ODR release programs. JCIT is also partnering with LASD and Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) to create "Returning Home Well LA", a program modeled on successful State practices of allowing individuals to complete their sentences in community-based supportive programs rather than in custody. Also, in collaboration with ATI, JCIT is exploring ways to mitigate extended lengths of stay which includes a review panel to determine the disposition of charges, particularly those that are disproportionately represented in the jail system, including Black people, cisgender women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Last, JCIT is working with ATI, LASD, and soon, a community agency to implement a program to release up to 300 pretrial individuals back to their homes, or to provide housing with supports while they await their trial dates. It is hoped that the success of this and other programs will provide the foundation for future growth and further depopulation.

To sustain and grow this work, JCIT alerted department heads from each of the involved County departments of the Board’s directive to close MCJ and identified lead managers responsible for depopulation and closure. Those departments and the lead managers are listed in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: County Department Leads**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Lead(s)</b>
Alternate Public Defender	Cesar Sanchez
Chief Executive Office	JCIT: Brandon T. Nichols ATI: Songhai Armstead Budget: Sheila Williams
County Counsel	Jason Gonzalez
District Attorney	Cynthia Nakao
Health Services	Christina Ghaly Correctional Health Services (CHS): Tim Belavich, Clemens Hong, and Hal Yee ODR: Peter Espinoza
Internal Services	David Harris
Mental Health	John Franklin Sierra
Probation	Richard Giron
Public Defender	Justine Esack
Public Health	Gary Tsai
Public Works	Anthony Nyivih
Sheriff	Brendan Corbett

Ongoing and regular meetings are scheduled with key County partners, including ODR and ATI, and JCIT plans to regularly solicit input and feedback from other County agencies, including the Sybil Brand Commission, the Jail Population Review Council and, in accordance with recent Board direction, the Gender Responsive Advisory Committee. Given recent reports that over 60 percent of people experiencing homelessness are justice-impacted, JCIT also plans to work closely with the County’s Homeless Initiative and others working to serve the needs of those without stable housing.

In addition to meeting with County departments, JCIT has also met with each Board office, external stakeholders, including people who have been incarcerated and their family members, the JFA Institute, consultant groups with expertise in funding and legislative opportunities, and community advocates including Dignity and Power Now, La Defensa, and the Vera Institute of Justice. Future interaction and dialogue with community

representatives will be accomplished in four ways: 1) the JCIT Executive Director will continue to have direct personal conversations with community leaders, 2) JCIT will continue to participate in the community forums facilitated by ODR (the Jail Population Review Council) and ATI (Care First Community Investment Advisory Committee), 3) JCIT will contract for the services of trusted community-based organizations to convene and facilitate targeted community meetings, including with people who have been incarcerated and survivors of harm, and 4) JCIT will work with the County's oversight agencies to facilitate focus groups and townhalls with people who are in jail about needs and services they needed prior to incarceration and support upon release and reentry.

Accompanied by staff from the Office of Inspector General and CHS, LASD facilitated a tour for JCIT staff through the Inmate Reception Center, portions of the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, and MCJ, including the K6-G units. Direct perspective on each jail facility will serve as a foundation to building rapport with people who are incarcerated and the staff who assess the needs and provide services to this population. JCIT intends to tour the Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF) and other jail facilities during the next reporting period.

As directed by your Board in the October 19, 2021 motion, JCIT has also begun collaborating with ATI, ODR, and Gender Responsive Services to work with the Gender Responsive Advisory Committee (GRAC) to prioritize and implement the recommendations made in the GRAC report that furthers JCIT's mandate to decrease the jail population and close MCJ, and the County's mission to expand the community-based system of care for cisgender women, two spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and transgender, gender non-conforming and/or intersex people (2S-LGBQ+TGI). Pursuant to that motion, JCIT is developing a scope of work that will facilitate an academic study, focused on racial equity, to perform a population study on the 2S-LGBQ+TGI population, including those housed at CRDF and in the K6-G units at other County facilities. JCIT has started working with the Director of Gender Responsive Services, the GRAC members, DHS, CHS, and the currently incarcerated population to arrange roundtable discussions on how to prioritize and implement recommendations from the GRAC report that promote gender-responsive, trauma-informed services and programming for the CRDF and K6-G populations that do not qualify for release. JCIT will report-back in January 2022 on the status of the foregoing directives.

### **Next Steps**

In addition to the specific steps outlined above, JCIT will continue to work with the Board offices, County departments, Board-established initiatives, and community stakeholders to move forward with the directives contained in the Board's June 22, 2021 motion and

Each Supervisor  
November 16, 2021  
Page 6

the recommendations outlined above and provide a status update every 90 days. Should you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 262-7791 or by email at [bnichols@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:bnichols@ceo.lacounty.gov).

FAD:JN:BN:GE:js

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
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