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Civil Grand Jury: San Francisco Jails At A Breaking Point

SAN FRANCISCO (PR NEWSWIRE) JUNE 9, 2026 –The San Francisco Civil Grand Jury released a report today documenting its investigation of a crisis in San Francisco's Jails (the "Jails") that can no longer be ignored.

Three problems have grown and converged to threaten the health and safety of the 15,000-plus people who cycle through the Jails each year — and the safety of the employees who work there: a rapidly rising population with acute medical, mental health, and substance use needs that the Jails are not designed to serve; deteriorating infrastructure, consisting of both overcrowded facilities suffering from decades of deferred maintenance, and grossly outdated technology; and a staffing model dependent on overtime, with its destructive effects on employee health and well-being and the administration of the Jails.

These three troubling trends are detailed below:

- First, the Jails' population is increasing rapidly, and inmates arrive with increasingly complex health needs, due in part to the fentanyl crisis. By late 2025, approximately 47% of inmates had open mental health cases. Further, misdemeanor narcotics arrests in San Francisco surged between 2022 and 2025— from 184 to 1,246 annually — likely driven by new law enforcement initiatives and new voter initiatives, challenging the capacity of the Jails to process or hold so many inmates. The Jails are legally required to release many of these people in less than a day, without the time and resources to stabilize and treat people during these brief stops.

- Second, the Jail facilities, including technology infrastructure, have suffered from decades of underinvestment and deferred maintenance. For example, every person the Sheriff's Office books or releases passes through County Jail #1. That facility must now serve — without dedicated space, physical expansion, or structural modification — as the court holding area for 100 or so inmates bused daily to San Francisco from San Bruno. This holding area, the booking floor, the triage nurses, and the release process now co-exist in the same overcrowded space. Overflow inmates wait in a gym while awaiting court proceedings. The technology infrastructure is no better. A full system failure would force the Jails to revert to paper processes to operate. In 2024, the Sheriff's Office

transferred $3.3 million that had been earmarked to replace its obsolete Jail Management System to cover overtime costs instead. The current budget restores just $1 million toward a 2027 deployment of a replacement system.

- Third, the Jail regularly operates below minimum required staffing levels, forcing lockdowns and service reductions. Deputies in the Jails average 28 hours of overtime weekly, and for some, work weeks can exceed 80 hours in total. Entire facilities have relied on mandatory overtime, with unhealthy effects on employee health and the Jails' budget and operations. Mandatory overtime has been temporarily lifted, but only until the end of this fiscal year, as part of drastic cost cutting needed to address overtime budget excesses).

The neglect of the Jails is structural. "Our report is not a critique of the dedicated employees who work in the Jails," said Margaret Keane, the investigation's chair. "It reflects on the resources and constraints under which they are forced to operate. The Jails don't control their own destiny — they cannot turn people away, set the D.A. 's charging policies, or speed up court cases. But they have become the city's tool of last resort for residents with untreated addiction, mental illness, or both. The Jails aren't built, funded, or staffed for that role. And there's historically been little political support to prioritize funding for the Jail population that suffers from the Jails' neglect."

"This report examines a critical governmental function that rarely comes into public view," said Ed Cooper, Grand Jury Foreperson. "The City and County of San Francisco is facing a Jails crisis that can no longer be ignored. Continuing to 'make do' is not a viable strategy for addressing the problems the Jails face, if it ever was."

Something must be done to address this crisis. The report includes findings and recommendations for City and County leadership to consider as part of that critical effort.

To read the full report "***When Making Do Doesn't Work: San Francisco Jails in Crisis***" please visit:

https://www.sf.gov/resource--2026--civil-grand-jury-reports-2025-2026

About the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury

The San Francisco Civil Grand Jury (the "Jury") is a government oversight panel of nineteen San Francisco citizens who volunteer for one year. Each Jury determines which local government entities within San Francisco it will investigate. The Jury cannot investigate disputes between private parties, criminal activity, or activities outside its

jurisdiction, which is the government of the City and County of San Francisco ("City") and any other local governments within San Francisco city limits.

The Jury publishes public reports with findings and recommendations based on its investigations.

Read more about the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury at https://www.sf.gov/departments--civil-grand-jury. Civil Grand Jury reports may be viewed online at https://www.sf.gov/departments--civil-grand-jury

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