CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT OVERSIGHT BOARD

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To: Honorable Rochelle East, Presiding Judge of the SF Superior Court
The San Francisco Civil Grand Jury

From: The San Francisco Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB)

Date: September 28, 2026

Subject: Official Consolidated Response to the Civil Grand Jury Report on San Francisco Jail Conditions, Staffing, and Operations

Status: Approved by Motion and Adopted into the Official Record

Pursuant to its regulatory and oversight authority, the Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB) has formally reviewed, debated, and approved individual responses to the Civil Grand Jury's findings and recommendations. In the interest of clarity, transparency, and public accountability, the Board has consolidated its respective findings agreements, systemic determinations, reporting tracks, and language access mandates into this unified transmittal.

Civil Grand Jury Finding F1
City and County leadership would benefit from first-hand knowledge obtained through inspection of the jail facilities and operations to enable them to better understand how policy changes affecting budget and operations for the Jails impact the operation of the Jails.

Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB) Response to Finding Number 1 (F1)
The Sheriff's Department Oversight Board agrees with Finding Number F1 and submits the following written response:

The Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB) will resume monthly jail visits conducted in compliance with the Brown Act and applicable confidentiality requirements. Visits will include both scheduled visits and, where permitted, unannounced or short-notice visits to observe actual operating conditions. The Board recommends that the Sheriff designate a standing liaison to facilitate access.

Visits will examine movement and cell-time programming, health services, visitation, classification, facility conditions, library access, and lockdowns. Visits will also include the Reset Center, hospital settings serving people in custody (including the San Francisco General Psychiatric Ward), and the

psychiatric unit at County Jail #2 (CJ2), subject to applicable access and privacy requirements. When possible, Board members will hear directly from front-line employees and people in custody.

Visits will include follow-ups on complaints and additional inspections when extraordinary public concerns arise. The Board considers an Inspector General essential

to sustain independent jail oversight and coordination of inspections to address and follow through on this recommendation.

The Board also recommends visits no less than quarterly by elected officials and representatives of coordinating departments and agencies. This includes, but is not limited to, representatives of the Mayor's Office, the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Public Health, the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, Prisoner Legal Services, and other relevant agencies. These visits should provide firsthand knowledge to inform decisions concerning jail funding, conditions, and policies.

Participants should receive an orientation or written briefing addressing jail operations, staffing, budget constraints, and unresolved oversight concerns. The Board also requests structured debriefings on inspections and investigations that protect confidential information while identifying operational risks, budget consequences, staffing deficiencies, and impacts on people in custody, employees, families, and the public.

Grand Jury Finding F3
The Jails are dangerously close to capacity, and SFSO has not convened the Crowding Committee despite meeting the capacity triggers outlined in the SFSO Custody and Court Operations Manual, Policy 511.2.

SDOB Response to Finding Number Three (F3)
The Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB) shares the Civil Grand Jury's concern regarding jail crowding in Finding F3 and submits the following written response:

The SDOB emphasizes from the outset that jail overcrowding and staffing strain are systemic, system-caused issues driven by outside entities—including the Judiciary, judges determining bail and sentencing, the District Attorney's Office, and law enforcement operations (such as the Dimock operation). Consequently, this is not a burden that should be shouldered alone by the Sheriff's Office.

Furthermore, the SDOB strongly believes that jails should not serve as holding facilities or mental health hospitals for individuals suffering from dual diagnoses, acute mental health struggles, or substance abuse.

To address these compounding issues, jail capacity must be assessed by more than a physical bed count. The assessment must account for classification, medical and behavioral health needs, security requirements, unusable housing units, staffing levels, and a heavy reliance on mandated overtime. It must evaluate how staffing strategies and forced overtime affect employee fatigue, call-outs, safe operations, and the overall care and safety of people in custody.

To ensure transparent operational oversight, the Board requires the following separated reporting tracks:

- SFSO Data Reporting: The San Francisco Sheriff's Office (SFSO) shall provide accurate, disaggregated population and operational data quarterly to the Sheriff, Board of Supervisors, SDOB, and the public (subject to confidentiality requirements). Reporting must distinguish

  between people awaiting processing, short-term detention, and those requiring housing assignments. It must track parole-related detention, length of stay, unavailable housing units, staffing shortages, mandatory overtime, and service interruptions. SFSO must explain how these factors relate to the convening triggers in Policy 511.2. Reliable data collection and timely analysis must be supported by adequate funding and technology, with assistance from the Office of the Inspector General.

- Crowding Committee Convening: Completely separate from quarterly SFSO data tracking, the Board recommends that the SFSO promptly convene the Crowding Committee. The Committee must meet at least annually, with consideration for twice-yearly meetings, regardless of whether numerical triggers have been reached. This supports preventive planning without resolving the disputed interpretation of existing policy. The Committee should assess whether funding, staffing, technology, or programming limits alternatives to incarceration (such as electronic monitoring) and if those limitations drive additional detention. The Committee must maintain written minutes, attendance records, and documented corrective actions.

Ultimately, effective population management requires structural coordination among the SFSO, the Judiciary, prosecutors, law enforcement, parole authorities, and health and community service providers.

Grand Jury Finding F13
Incidents of below minimum staffing result in facility lockdowns or lesser mobility restrictions, cause suspended programming, reduce out-of-cell time, interrupt access to health services, impede visitation, and have other negative impacts on inmates, yet data on lockdowns is unavailable.

SDOB Response to Finding Number Thirteen(F13)
The Sheriff's Department Oversight Board agrees with Finding F13 in its entirety and submits the following written response:

Below-minimum staffing can result in facility lockdowns or lesser mobility restrictions, suspended programming, reduced out-of-cell time, interrupted health services, impeded visitations, and other negative impacts on people in custody. The absence of available lockdown data limits accountability and the ability to evaluate and address these impacts. The Board encourages the San Francisco Sheriff's Office (SFSO) to continue carefully tailoring lockdowns to the specific circumstances requiring them and to avoid lockdowns whenever possible. [1]

The Board recognizes that overcrowding and understaffing affect people in custody, their families, and staff. The correctional and justice system should coordinate to ensure that detention decisions remain grounded in applicable legal standards and individualized circumstances while addressing crowding and staffing pressures.

Importantly, neither overcrowding nor understaffing should impede timely, confidential access to counsel—including in-person attorney visits—nor access to language services for incarcerated individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

To ensure full operational compliance with the San Francisco Language Access Ordinance, the Board recommends that the SFSO assess and report on how staffing shortages, lockdowns, and mobility restrictions affect meaningful language access. This must include an evaluation of an individual's ability to communicate with counsel, request medical care, and obtain other essential services. The assessment should specifically address access to qualified, court-certified interpreters (rather than a standard telephone language line), bilingual staff, telephone interpretation, and translated booking and medical materials.

Although language access was not specifically examined in the cited Civil Grand Jury report, Board members raised serious concerns about unverified operational gaps. This includes an incident where an incarcerated person was required to interpret for another individual regarding legal rights and court attendance admonitions. The Board recommends reviewing these concerns and establishing strict safeguards to ensure all timely, confidential communication occurs exclusively through qualified language assistance.

The Board acknowledges members' reports of prior improvements in family notification and more narrowly tailored lockdowns following engagement with the SFSO and the Inspector General. These efforts should continue, including timely notifications of visitation disruptions and the protection of essential services.

The Board recommends incorporating questions about lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and language assistance into voluntary surveys of incarcerated individuals. These questions should allow individuals to describe their experiences, including effects on medical care, programming, out-of-cell time, family contact, and access to counsel. Participation must be voluntary, with appropriate confidentiality and safeguards against retaliation. Survey responses should supplement operational records and identify concerns for follow-up, rather than serving as standing, conclusive findings alone. This feedback process ensures that incarcerated people can be heard even when administrative data are incomplete or unavailable.

The Board further recommends standardized tracking, a public dashboard with appropriate confidentiality protections, and regular reporting on lockdowns and mobility restrictions. The specific data requirements, implementation measures, and reporting recommendations should be addressed separately in the Board's response to R13A and R13B.

Respectfully submitted,



Sheriff's Department Oversight Board
By: William Palmer II, Board President