



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

PALOMA AGUIRRE
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: December 9, 2025

25

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**SHERIFF UPDATE ON SAN DIEGO COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

The San Diego County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) has the legal and moral obligation to care for individuals in its custodial setting. The Sheriff's Office operates a system of seven uniquely designed detention facilities located throughout San Diego County, with a combined average daily population of more than 4,300 incarcerated persons, which is trending towards an average daily population increase of 12 percent higher due to Proposition 36.

The Sheriff's Office has been making intentional efforts to improve service delivery to those in its custodial care. This has been achieved through focused and extraordinary changes to existing systems and processes centered on medical and mental health care services, intake procedures and screening, and contraband and narcotic detection. The Sheriff's Office has added physician level evaluations at every intake facility resulting in the ability to conduct a comprehensive review of chronic and pre-existing medical conditions. The capacity of the Out-Patient Stepdown Unit (OPSD) has also been expanded thus creating the ability to provide therapy and treatment to a larger part of our Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) population.

Unfortunately, improvements in these focused areas are often constrained due to the physical footprint and limited square footage of detention facilities that were not designed to accommodate and house population increases and longer term stays that resulted from California's Public Safety Realignment in 2011 (Assembly Bill 109). With long-stay incarcerated populations comes greater need and investments to replace and renovate the dated detention facilities and existing infrastructure within the jail system to operate proper medical and mental health care and substance use treatment, educational and vocational programs and reentry planning. Existing detention facilities, built on average several decades ago, are not conducive to optimal delivery of care and rehabilitation services, and in addition, significant investment in systems that have reached end-of-life, including upgrades to plumbing, security systems, HVAC, and electrical building infrastructure, is needed.

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SAN DIEGO COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Today's action seeks to provide the San Diego County Board of Supervisors with a presentation on the state of County detention facilities and the extent of immediate infrastructure needs required to maintain health and safety of Sheriff's Office employees and incarcerated people.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SHERIFF

1. Receive the Sheriff's Office presentation on the State of Local Detention Facility Infrastructure Needs.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Sheriff's Office prioritizes the health and safety of those in custody. Facility recommendations and requirements offer a baseline of the infrastructure necessary to enhance delivery of services which will improve outcomes and reduce health disparities. Above and beyond the Constitutional minimum requirements, jail facilities should reflect the community standard of integrated healthcare and support incarcerated persons with a holistic approach. The Sheriff's Office is continually enhancing technology and programs in County detention facilities to enhance the level of care and increase access, thus creating a physical environment conducive to the health and well-being of all incarcerated persons. This approach maximizes the overall health and life trajectory of incarcerated persons and better supports reentry to the community upon release.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The necessary facility replacements and facility improvements systemwide presented today all contribute to the County of San Diego's sustainability goal to provide just and equitable access to County services. The Sheriff's Office has been committed to improving its service delivery to those in its custodial care. Facility and system improvements and replacements support both a safer environment for incarcerated persons and more effective coordinated medical and mental health care service delivery. We are focused on a person-centered approach to rehabilitate individuals and want to provide equitable access for family members along with collaborative spaces for criminal justice and community-based partners. By investing in modern infrastructure, the Sheriff's Office will be able to provide enhanced care and resources to individuals in custody.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's action. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The San Diego County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) currently operates seven adult detention facilities in five locations throughout San Diego County with a combined average daily population of more than 4,300 incarcerated persons. The seven detention facilities vary in age, size, design, and operation. Some are in urban areas, co-located with regional court complexes providing high

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SAN DIEGO COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

levels of security; and others are medium security facilities located in rural settings, serving the needs of lower risk incarcerated persons.

These seven detention facilities support intake, housing, medical/psychiatric units, and reentry services for six levels of male and female incarcerated populations. They are classified as Type II Facilities by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC). Type II Facilities are defined as a local facility used for the detention of persons pending arraignment, during trial, and upon a sentence of commitment. The Sheriff's Office has the legal obligation to care for persons held in custody and is responsible for booking arrestees and releasing incarcerated persons, ensuring court appearances, and providing necessary daily care for those in custody. The Sheriff's Office provides a wide array of onsite services and programs at the detention facilities, including medical, mental health, food services, counseling, recreation, religious accommodations, education, and reentry services.

On August 16, 2022 (23) the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed a series of actions focused on supporting the Sheriff's Office in fulfilling the County of San Diego's (County) duty of providing sufficient care for incarcerated persons. The approved actions included emergency measures designed to keep individuals safe from drug overdoses in San Diego County detention facilities. Among the measures were the expeditious roll out of staffing incentives, exploration of innovative strategies to promote security and wellness, and the acquisition of the latest body scanner technology and other investments to support the Sheriff's efforts to intercept and interdict dangerous drugs, especially fentanyl, from entering the jail system. On October 11, 2022 (7) the Board received an update from the Sheriff's Office on its progress regarding efforts to implement emergency measures designed to prevent in-custody deaths. These measures included more thorough security checks, critical incident reviews, multi-disciplinary wellness checks, voluntary urine screenings at intake to identify individuals coming into custody with illicit drugs in their system, utilizing Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for individuals with substance use disorders, and the deployment of naloxone in detention facilities, among other efforts.

In January 2023, Sheriff Kelly Martinez began her term as Sheriff with a commitment to improving jail conditions. Since taking office, the Sheriff's dedicated employees have driven this commitment across major jail reforms focused on improving medical and mental-health care, reducing overdoses and upgrading infrastructure and technology across San Diego County detention facilities. These initiatives include enhanced intake screening, expanded telehealth, and stronger contraband controls which have led to a significant drop in overdoses and decreases in suicide deaths. In addition, reentry efforts have strengthened by expanding partnerships that connect individuals to housing, job training and treatment programs before release – these efforts all aim to reduce returns to custody. As part of the Sheriff's commitment to improving service delivery for those in the Sheriff's custodial care, and to uphold transparency and communication with the community, the Sheriff and members of her leadership team and Detention Services Bureau, held a State of the Jails press conference in July 2023 which provided a comprehensive update on construction projects, technological advancements, healthcare services, accessibility, reentry services and drug interdiction within the jails.

County detention facilities were not constructed to accommodate the standards and level of care required for today's incarcerated population. Additionally, many of the necessary infrastructure

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SAN DIEGO COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

changes, including those related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are extensive in scope and are costly and time consuming, requiring relocation of hundreds of people. For example, Rock Mountain Detention Facility (RMDF) was partially opened and staffed in July 2023, which allowed for renovations to begin at the George Bailey Detention Facility (GBDF). The Sheriff's Office has taken significant steps to increase accessibility for persons with mobility disabilities, while complying with all other state laws and constitutionally protected rights for incarcerated individuals. ADA modifications are underway at the San Diego Central Jail and will continue well into 2026. Additionally, body worn cameras (BWC) have been implemented in all detentions facilities to include the Sheriff's Transportation Unit.

Pursuant to Board Policy G-16 Capital Facilities Planning, the Department of General Services (DGS) and the Sheriff's Office prepared a Detention Facility Strategic Framework Plan (Detention Facility SFP) to bring the County of San Diego's detention facility portfolio in line with County, DGS and Sheriff's Office's strategic goals and objectives. The Detention Facility SFP provides a system-level review of the Sheriff's Office's seven adult detention facilities and a long-term vision for the detention facility system that will support asset and equity management planning and decision making for a 10-year period. The 2023 plan was presented to the Board on November 7, 2023 (26) which recommended \$229 million in major maintenance investment needed in the jail system, plus the replacement of Vista Detention Facility which was estimated at \$316 million based on the Strategic Facility Plan and not the comprehensive study underway which estimates replacement costs far greater.

One of the key assessments from the Detention Facility SFP is that the Sheriff's Office has aged facilities. The detention facilities range in age from 11 to over 50 years, with an average age of more than 30 years. With constant (24-hour/seven days a week) occupancy and use, detention facilities typically exceed their useful life after 30 years and are due for major renovations or replacement. The facilities not only physically deteriorate but require programmatic updates to provide sufficient space for contemporary medical and mental health treatment, programming, and educational/vocational services for those in custody. As these facilities age, maintenance needs compound and replacement parts for critical facility components become increasingly difficult to source. Changes in the law related to detention operations and policies reflecting best practices also render older jail facilities functionally obsolete.

To further underscore, San Diego County's detention facilities are aging rapidly, with the Vista Detention Facility (VDF) standing as the oldest in the Sheriff's network at over 50 years old. Its outdated design, limited space for modern rehabilitative services, and deteriorating systems highlight the urgent need for significant investment to ensure safe, efficient, and humane operations. In response, a comprehensive study led by DGS and their contractor, Kitchell, is near completion and recommends full replacement of VDF. This year-long planning effort includes a detailed needs assessment, programming analysis (including reentry services), and cost estimates. Given VDF's critical role as the only North County booking facility, the Sheriff's Office is continuing to explore service delivery approaches to support this transformative project, ensuring it aligns with contemporary justice and public safety needs. The County has recommended a plan to design and build the new Vista Detention and Re-entry Facility over nine years at a cost of \$720 million which is anticipated to accommodate the current average daily population. Future growth and the need to accommodate additional incarcerated individuals was estimated in the draft project

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SAN DIEGO COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES
INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Master Plan but is not reflected in the \$720 million proposed build. Constructing the jail over nine years will bring cost escalation and negative impacts to staff, individuals housed at Vista Detention Facility, and users of the facility i.e. law enforcement agencies, other justice partners, Public Defender, etc. We look forward to working with the County to finalize project timing and scope and to incorporate the cost of the new Vista Detention Facility in the Capital Improvement Needs Assessment (CINA) that will be considered by your Board in March 2026.

In the Spring of 2024, the Sheriff's Office retained a consultant to provide strategic counsel, outreach planning and implementation, and ultimately advisory services to assist with the exploration and evaluation of various aspects and options of available revenue measures to fund public safety improvements, with the replacement or renovation of the VDF considered a top priority. A key part of this effort included presenting recommendations for revenue sources for the renovation or replacement of VDF. The consultant's findings recommended that the County work closely with the Board of Supervisors to identify opportunities to appropriate or reappropriate existing County funds to support, either in full or in part, the renovation or replacement of the VDF. Additionally, the consultant proposes consideration of a public safety and infrastructure bond measure for the 2026 ballot, which could generate funding for the VDF project as part of a broader investment in critical County infrastructure.

To further the collective interest in identifying revenue sources to address infrastructure needs, the Sheriff's Office had also garnered the support of the County to include in its Legislative Program advocacy direction to pursue state and federal resources to support the infrastructure needs of County Detention Facilities to ensure proper medical and mental health care can be advanced and rehabilitative programming can be further administered in accordance with the Sheriff's Office comprehensive service delivery model.

The Sheriff's Office has invested significant internal resources in recent years to address major maintenance needs within the jail system. However, significant additional investment is urgently needed by the County of San Diego in the coming years to replace VDF while simultaneously dedicating the necessary resources to ensure the other six County jails remain operational.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's board actions advance the Equity and Justice Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by taking steps to increase the overall well-being of individuals who are currently in custody in San Diego County detention facilities and ensuring we have modern facilities to deliver quality care, reduce recidivism, and improve public safety.

Respectfully submitted,



KELLY A. MARTINEZ
Sheriff

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A