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Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice

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Report

PRIORITIZING INCARCERATION: DOES SAN FRANCISCO NEED A JAIL ON TREASURE ISLAND?

by

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INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Sheriff's Department saw its budget grow again this year, having just received \$2.1 million from City coffers to establish the former Treasure Island Brig as a new women's jail. Slated to open in January of 1998, the Treasure Island facility will house 80 to 138 women from San Francisco County Jail 8, allegedly, to alleviate what the Sheriff's Department calls "overcrowding." However, this allocation of public funds represents yet another increase in funding for the Sheriff's Department which has been the fastest growing budget in San Francisco government over the past decade. The Sheriff's budget has grown from \$16 million in 1985 to \$53 million in 1996, a 227% increase in only 11 years.

A new women's jail with expanded capacity is the last thing the Sheriff's Department, and more importantly, San Francisco needs. Local law enforcement officials' reliance on the use of jails for low-level offenders represents one of the more objectionable trends in the City's criminal justice system. Eighty-five percent of the offenders entering San Francisco's jail are booked in for non-violent offenses.

With fewer individuals in the crime-prone age group, 15-30, San Francisco's high-risk population is in steady decline. The decline in population of this age group has already produced substantial reductions in the jail population. With the projected changes in San Francisco's population, the need for a new jail is further lessened. The \$2.1 million proposed for the new jail should be reallocated to a variety of critical and immediate needs such as child care services, homeless services, and drug treatment programs.

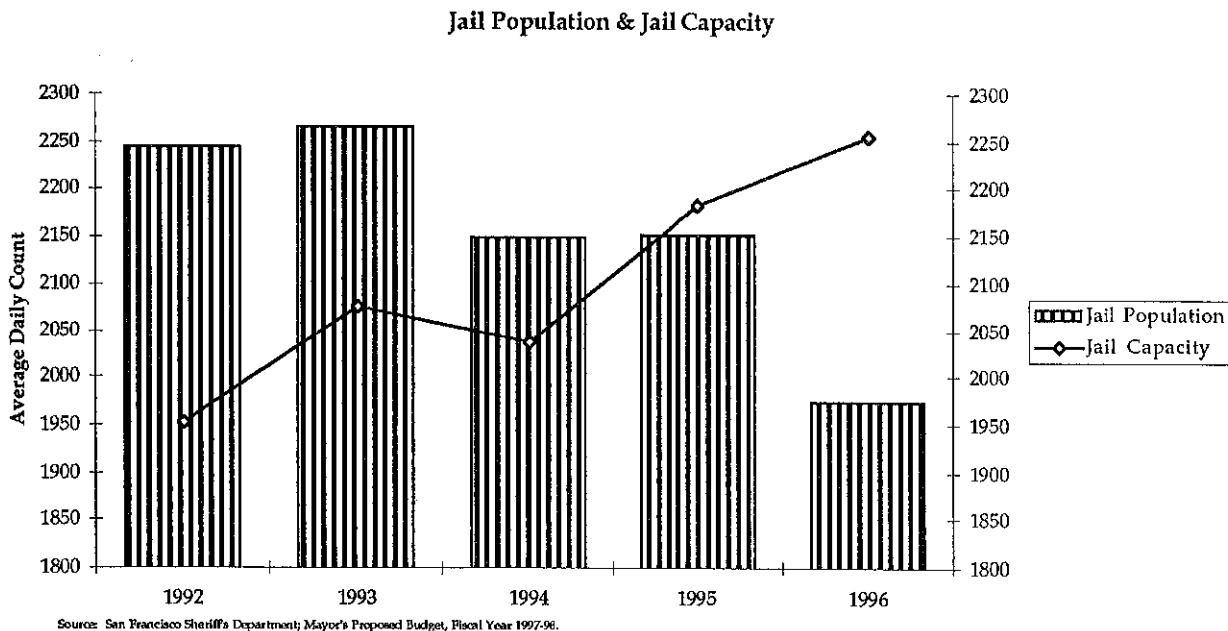
THE NON-EXISTENT NEED FOR A NEW JAIL FACILITY

San Francisco's Decreasing Jail Population

Since the 1970's, San Francisco's jails have faced deplorable conditions that have, in the past, justified the construction of new facilities. However, this allocation of millions of tax dollars toward new facilities has done little to resolve jail conditions. More importantly, the need for more jail slots has decreased markedly in the past 10 years.

There is no justifiable demand in San Francisco for a new jail. The jail population in San Francisco has decreased steadily in recent years [See Figure 1]. Since 1993, the average daily population for the total San Francisco jail system declined to the point where the jails are running under capacity. (Mayor's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 1997 - 1998, p. 115).

FIGURE 1: Jail Population in San Francisco



San Francisco's Stabilized Population

Although California's population growth is expected to continue through the next fifty years, San Francisco will not see any significant increase in its resident population. Through this period, San Francisco's population is expected to grow by only 3.8 percent while California's resident population will grow by over 102 percent, and the U.S. population by 49.4 percent (Department of Finance, 1994 California Statistical Abstract; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1994 Statistical Abstract of the United States) [See Table 1]

TABLE 1: San Francisco Population

*San Francisco Total Population **
(Resident Population in Thousands)

	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2030</u>
San Francisco	723.9	774.01	781.74	777.39	773.35

* Reprinted from the Commission on the Status of Women, Statistical Data on Women, October, 1996.

Decreasing jail populations coupled with San Francisco's stable resident population clearly indicate the absence of a need for more jail space. Less offenders and more available jail space frustrate the proposed purpose of the Treasure Island facility (to reduce overcrowding). **There should be a greater focus on alternative sentencing programs.** As evidenced, the Treasure Island facility proposal is unjustifiable. It is obvious that limited public funds would be better directed towards prevention and intervention services for offenders.

The New Jail's Potential Negative Impact on Women

Incarcerated women are generally poor, women of color, with one or more children. For this reason the development of alternatives to meet the specialized needs of these women requires the highest priority. Furthermore, the Treasure Island brig is isolated with limited accessibility, burdening family visitation and the multiple social programs currently provided at the CJ8 facility.

Keeping in mind the above population trend analysis, this new facility will provide the city with an overabundance of empty beds. This abundance of jail space will, ultimately, lead to an increase in the reliance on incarceration, which will disproportionately affect impoverished minority women (with families), who have committed non violent crimes.

Low Number of Female Violent Crime Offenders

Of San Francisco's current jail population, only 11.9 percent are women (Average Daily Population, Sheriff's Department). Additionally, because of San Francisco's projected population stability, the risk of any substantial increase in women offenders is unlikely. Although women comprise only 11.9 percent of felonious arrests, only 2.42 percent are violent (homicide, manslaughter, rape, robbery, assault, kidnapping, other sex crimes, and weapons crimes) (California Department of Justice, Adult and Juvenile Arrests Reported, 1995). The majority of women are arrested for narcotics, and theft crimes. These types of crimes provide the best potential for rehabilitation and community-based treatment for offenders.

Women With Children

A 1991 study by the San Francisco Department of Public Health Forensic Services examined 101 members of the population at San Francisco CJ 1 (53 women and 48 men), and found that 75 percent of the women incarcerated have children (70 percent of these children were twelve years or younger) (Public Health Forensic Services, Prisoners as Multi-System Users, June 1991, p. 2). An additional 13 percent of women indicated that they were single parents while living with their children (Id, at p. 3, 72).

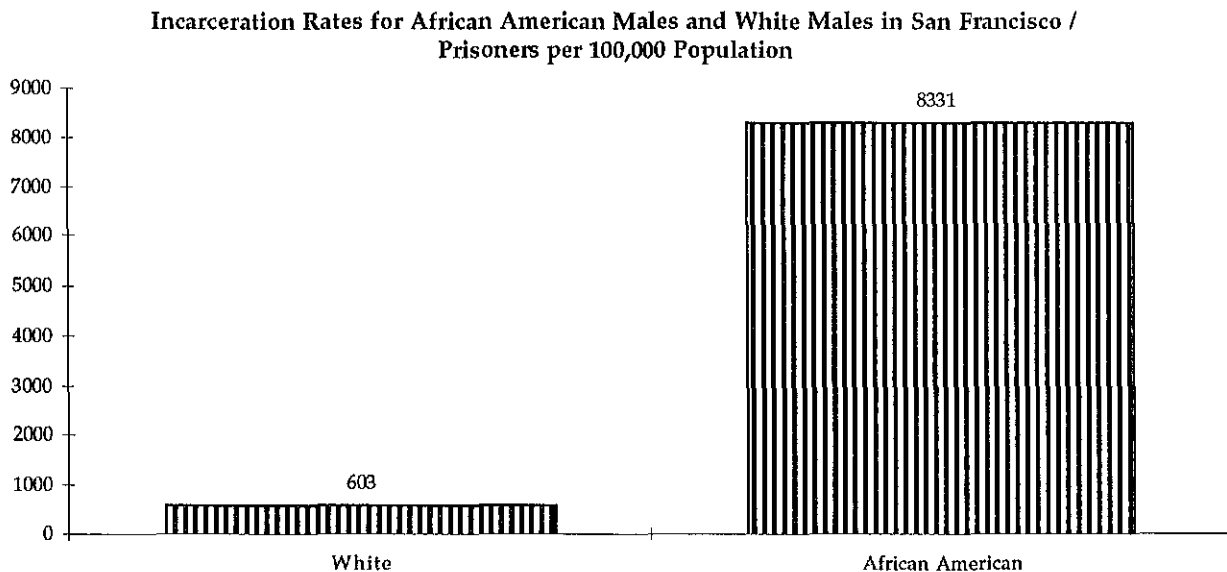
Poverty & Residence

Ninety percent of women and men who are arrested lived in San Francisco at the time of the offense. Of the 90% arrested, 85% of the women and 71% of the men were from the Bayview-Hunter's Point, the Tenderloin, the Mission, Haight-Fillmore, South of Market, Civic Center, Portrero, and the Ingleside-Oceanview districts (Public Health, p.52). Sixty-two percent of the women received public assistance in the form of general assistance, non-assistance food stamps, AFDC, or family and children services. Furthermore, nearly one quarter of the women reported that they applied for public assistance but were denied at least once in the last two years. (Public Health, p.8)

Race & Incarceration

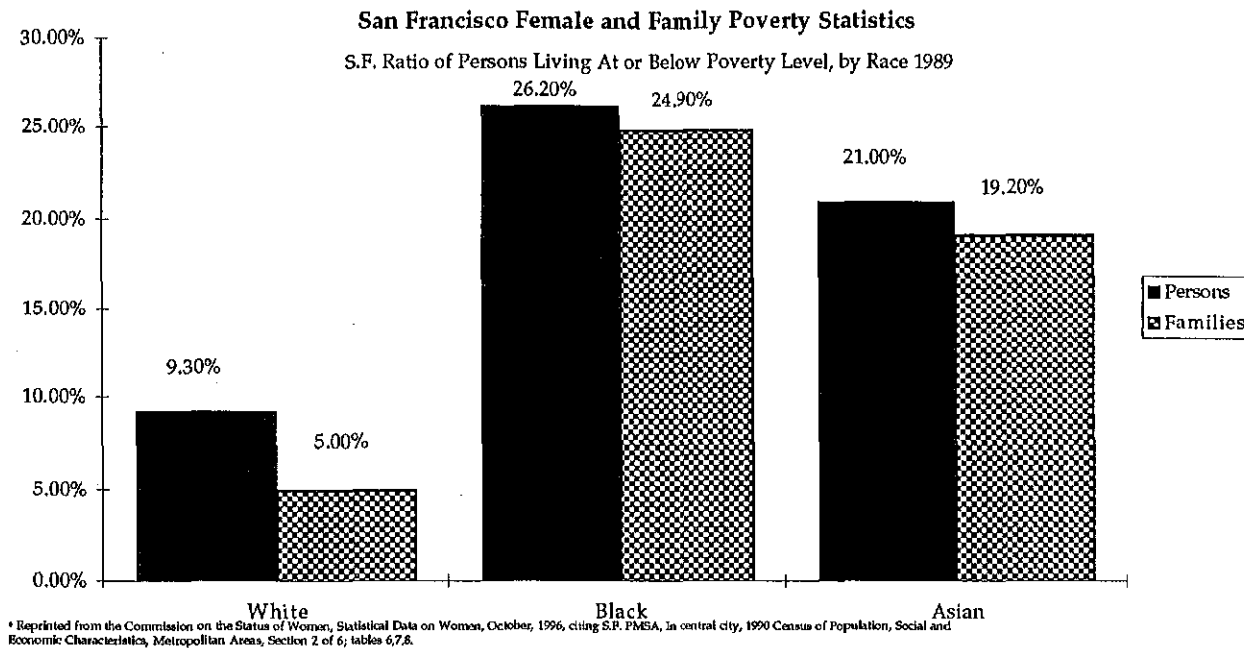
Currently, African Americans comprise 11% of the San Francisco county general adult population, while 48% of the county's inmates are African-American (San Francisco Sheriff's Dept.). African-American and Latino adults combined comprise 26% of San Francisco's adult population, yet account for 77% of county jail inmates. (San Francisco Sheriff's Dept.). The ratio of African American women living at or below the poverty level in San Francisco in 1989 was 26.2% compared to 21% and 9.3% for Asian-Americans and non-Hispanic whites respectively [See Figures 2 & 3]

FIGURE 2: Incarceration Rates in San Francisco



*Reprinted from Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice Report, October, 1994, citing State Department of Finance; San Francisco Sheriff's Department; California Department of Corrections; California Youth Authority

FIGURE 3: San Francisco Female Poverty Statistics



These figures indicate that incarcerated women are not only poor, but generally, African-American, unemployed, and parents of young children. Operating this new jail facility would not only perpetuate the "lock 'em up" approach that has made California a leader in incarceration, but it would also have a disproportionate impact on poor women from the African-American community.

FUNDING FOR EMPOWERMENT, NOT INCARCERATION

San Francisco's current lack of guidance in managing its funds is nothing new in light of the entire state's trend of increased incarceration spending. However, in a city which prides itself on compassion and tolerance, it is of great consequence to consider areas in which money could be better spent. These areas include: child care, services for the homeless, and drug treatment services. All three areas are facing rapidly growing caseloads with shrinking sources of funding. Compared to increased expenditures on jails, these service areas, so vital to disadvantaged women, have seen their funding sources decrease as law enforcement funding has grown exponentially.

The focus of this correlation relates to the enormous benefit these services provide to women. It is these exact services which keep women from entering the criminal justice system. Thus, to fund a new jail would not only divert funds from essential service programs but also perpetuate a vicious cycle of poverty and incarceration for San Francisco's disadvantaged women.

Child Care

The Mayor's Welfare Reform Task Force Report states that people entering the workforce under welfare reform, especially parents of young children, are dependent on "availability of subsidized child care" to enter the labor market (The Mayor's Welfare Reform Task Force Final Report, May 1997 p.21). In the first year of reforms, the report states that 3,500 child care slots will be needed, rising to 11,000 by the third year. Thus, to meet this need, the report states that "the supply of child care and the number of subsidies available will need to be increased" (Id.).

Rather than allocate \$2.1 million to the Sheriff's Department, San Francisco could allocate these funds to child care subsidies. This allocation of city funds would significantly lower the number of children and their families waiting for child care slots. Over one-thousand subsidies of \$2,000 each could end what Joseph Wilson calls, "the child care crisis that is upon us."

The \$2.1 million allocated to the Treasure Island jail could provide 223 infants or 323 children [between the ages of 2 and 5] with center-based care for an entire year. These figures are significant in light of the enormous caseload that subsidy-based child care providers have been burdened with. In recent months, there has been a phenomenal rise in the number of children on waiting lists at various child care centers in San Francisco. According to Joseph Wilson of Coleman Advocates, an advocacy group on behalf of children's rights, several thousand families are on waiting lists due to the lack of government funded subsidies to family child care centers.

Homeless Services/Shelters

In recent months, four major homeless shelters in San Francisco have reported a precipitous rise in the number of "turnaways." The Episcopal Sanctuary, Multi-Service Center [North], the Women's Place, and Saint Anthony's all report dramatic rises in the number of women who have been turned away due to a lack of space. Rather than building a new jail for women, San Francisco could devote new funds to aiding women. Serving women by housing them provides a more effectual and humane approach for dealing with San Francisco's disadvantaged women.

Currently, the Multi-Service Center has a yearly operating cost of approximately \$1.4 million. With this budget, they operate 400 beds (100 allocated specifically for women) in conjunction with case management and programming services. The \$2.1 million budgeted to the Sheriff's Office could operate 600 Multi-Service Center beds. Again, the need to reassess the City's funding choices are clear. San Francisco can choose to provide preventative services to potential offenders, aiding their way to recovery, or perpetuate the vicious cycle that keep these women in the criminal justice system.

Drug Treatment

Drug treatment and rehabilitation play crucial roles in providing women with the opportunity to become productive members of society, and can concurrently work towards ending our criminal justice system's reliance on incarceration as the prevalent model of rehabilitation. Because of the large percentage of women incarcerated on drug charges, drug treatment and rehabilitation is the key factor in alleviating the number of women in our jail systems.

One of the major components of San Francisco's Welfare Reform Program is Treatment on Demand, a program designed to eliminate waiting lists for substance abusers seeking treatment. Prior to issuing a final report, the Mayor commissioned a task force to determine the initial costs of the program. The task force, comprised of mayoral appointees, recommended additional treatment slots at a cost of approximately \$8 million. San Francisco however, allocated only \$6 million to the program in its 1997-1998 fiscal budget -- a difference of \$2 million which could be reconciled by abandoning the Treasure Island Jail.

At Walden House, San Francisco's largest residential/outpatient drug treatment program, individuals must wait up to 3 weeks for a slot. Patty Cobb, financial analyst for Walden House, estimates that for \$2.1 million, at least 115 clients could receive residential treatment for one year (at \$22,000 per year for each bed). Walden House receives approximately \$5 million in funding from San Francisco; \$2 million could provide this service agency with resources to decrease waiting time; and consequently, treat substance abusers who may potentially become jail inmates.

The need to reassess San Francisco's priorities is clear. Do we fund drug rehabilitation programs to assist substance-abusers, with the goal of preventing the commission of crimes, or are we to wait until they commit the crime, potentially harming others, and then send them off to Treasure Island?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- * Reallocate those funds earmarked for the San Francisco Sheriff's Department to three social service areas which would better aid disadvantaged women: child care subsidies, homeless shelters/services, and drug treatment programs.
- * Enact a moratorium on the funding and building of new jail facilities; beginning with the abandonment of the Treasure Island Women's County jail.

CONCLUSION

San Francisco is a city that prides itself on its treatment of its disadvantaged and indigent citizens, responding to these populations with compassion and reason. In this context, San Francisco needs to create opportunities to address the disparities evident in the criminal justice system. Rather than building yet another jail facility, San Francisco should live up to its reputation as one of the greatest cities in the world and provide humane alternatives for its citizenry.

The numbers strongly indicate the absence of a need for a new jail facility. Jail populations and the numbers of "at-risk", "crime prone" groups are decreasing. San Francisco's resident population is projected to remain stable through the millennium. With its potential negative impact on poor women of color, with children, the Treasure island facility is indicative of the City's unwillingness to provide rehabilitative alternatives to women. San Francisco should focus its energy and, more importantly, its funding on programs like child care services, homeless services/shelters, and drug treatment. Funding for these type of alternative programs would go much further towards preventing recidivism for low-level offenders. Furthermore, with the knowledge that San Francisco's jail population is decreasing, the Sherriff's Department has shown no justifiable need for a new women's jail on Treasure Island.

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