



## Supervisors Turn Down Proposed County Jail Expansion Sheriff Can Still Go Ahead with State Funding Application

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Community members and organizations packed the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors' meeting room before the supervisors' vote on the proposed expansion of the West County Detention Facility. Photo courtesy of the California Nurses Association.

*Martinez* – The vote to contribute \$10 million for the expansion of a Contra Costa County jail unexpectedly failed to garner enough support from the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, hampering Sheriff David Livingston's application for \$80 million in state money for the construction.

Community members packed the Board meeting room on Tuesday, most in opposition to the Sheriff's proposal to construct a new high-security wing at the West County Detention Facility in Richmond, which would result in a net increase of 418 jail beds.

Those opposed to the proposal, including representatives of the City of Richmond, argued that county funds should instead be used on critical services that would better address the root causes of crime, such as job training, affordable housing, mental health services and education.

Sheriff Livingston had justified the expansion by claiming it would improve the availability of mental health and re-entry services behind bars without increasing the county's total jail capacity.

Speaking in response to the Sheriff's justifications, Pastor B.K. Woodson of the Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy said, "People should not have to be locked up to get mental health treatment, have a roof over their heads and receive three meals a day."

“We need to end the era of mass incarceration and unlock the potential of our community,” said Woodson.

Members of the California Nurses Association also testified on the ongoing staffing needs at county hospitals and questioned how more money could be spent on incarceration at the expense of health care.

“We just saw the tragic closure of Doctors Medical Center, the only public hospital serving West County,” said Maggie Ewing, a 22-year veteran registered nurse at the Contra Costa County Regional Medical Center.

“The county should invest in adequate health services to our most vulnerable residents. We don’t need more jail cells,” she said.

After hours of debate, the Supervisors voted 3-1 in favor of the Sheriff’s plan, falling short of the 4-vote supermajority needed to approve the \$10 million in matching funds for the jail expansion.

Supervisor John Gioia, who represents West County, provided the decisive vote against the proposal.

Gioia said he voted against the plan because he recognized a “need to focus our investments instead on greater violence prevention and intervention opportunities, which are proven to lower incarceration rates.”

“We also need to continue to support re-entry programs to help formerly incarcerated individuals successfully return to their communities,” said Gioia.

While the Sheriff can still submit the application for the \$80 million state funding to the Board of State and Community Corrections, it will be at a serious competitive disadvantage to counties that have guaranteed local funding matches.

If the state were to approve funding for the proposal, it would return to the county Board of Supervisors for another vote.