



Californians United for a Responsible Budget

Oakland Office:
1322 Webster St # 210 Oakland, CA 94612
[510-435-1176 \(c\)](tel:510-435-1176)
[510-839-7615 \(f\)](tel:510-839-7615)

Los Angeles Office:
1137 E. Redondo Blvd. Inglewood, CA
213-864-8931(c)
www.curbprisonspending.org

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Mr. Matthew Diaz
County of Los Angeles
Chief Executive Office
754 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
mdiaz@ceo.lacounty.gov

To Mr. Diaz:

In response to the initial Environment Impact Report and the ongoing EIR process CURB and the No More Jails Coalition demand that the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, stop all plans to build an unnecessary and costly women's jail (1604 beds) at the former Mira Loma Detention Center. We believe that there are cheaper, more environmentally friendly, more humane and more sustainable alternatives that will lower rates of incarceration, drastically reduce the jail population and build stronger and healthier families and neighborhoods in our county. Jails are socially, economically and environmentally costly. The highest costs are paid by low-income communities of color – the same communities that also suffer the highest rates of unemployment, poverty, health problems, environmental pollution, inadequate housing, disenfranchisement, and lack of access to education.

The community in the City of Lancaster and the County of Los Angeles don't want a new jail, don't need a new jail, and can't afford a new jail. And, we can provide substantial documentation showing that Lancaster is an unsafe environment to house the most vulnerable people from our communities—mostly poor women and women of color—whose health would be affected by the poor air quality, high rates of valley fever, and hazardous waste sites in Lancaster. The people of Los Angeles need support and alternatives in the community, not a jail that will destroy their health and well-being.

CURB and the No More Jails Coalition are making several demands in regards to the Environment Impact Study for the proposed women's jail:

- 1) WE demand that 2 additional public meetings be scheduled after the first Draft Environment Impact Report (DEIR) is Released—One meeting in Lancaster and one in the greater Los Angeles area. This will give the public proper access to the process in order present their feedback in an effective manner.
- 2) WE demand that the DEIR be translated into Spanish to allow for more public input into this process.

3) WE demand that the Environmental Impact Study address, in depth, the environmental conditions that would impact the health of those who would be incarcerated on the premises, their families and children and people that are employed there including:

- **Air Quality:** The location has non-attainment for Particulates and has severe non-attainment for Ozone that can negatively impact the health of people in this particular region. Ozone is a cause of asthma; any people with respiratory issues and other vulnerabilities, including children who might come to visit, will be exposed to these major air quality issues.
- **Hazardous Materials:** The initial study states that the Mira Loma Detention Center is “identified in government databases as having hazardous waste generator and is the site of aboveground and underground fuel storage tanks”. It states that several other hazardous material users are in the vicinity. The site was also a former military base; such sites are almost uniformly known to have serious soil and water contamination issues. What hazardous materials are there? How would this impact the women locked up inside this proposed jail, the families and children visiting, and the workers?
- **Valley fever:** The initial report does not address Valley Fever, a serious illness that prisoners have contracted in state prisons, though it does state that the “Antelope Valley is subject to periods of high winds and powerful dust/sand storms”. As reported in an article titled DEATH DUST, by Dana Goodyear, New Yorker, January 2014, the soil around the Lancaster prisons—where the new women’s jail is to be built—tests positive for “cocci” Valley Fever as shown by Antje Lauer, soil microbiologist, and Ramon Guevara, an epidemiologist with the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health. Guevara is urgently trying to educate people about the emergent issue of cocci in his territory. He states, “The highest rate of infection is in the Antelope Valley, a rapidly developing outpost of the county that adjoins the southern edge of the San Joaquin Valley. In the past decade, the number of cases there has increased five hundred and forty-five per cent.” Healthy African Americans and Filipino community members are disproportionately vulnerable to this disease, and the elderly, immune-compromised and pregnant women are more susceptible. It would be a great tragedy to move forward with a supposed gender responsive jail for women (and potentially their children) in a toxic environment that guarantees certain death for vulnerable people.
- **Deteriorating Foundation and Moldy Walls:** L.A. County decided on the Mira Loma Site for the new women’s jail because of cost savings. Plans show that older buildings will be renovated and used to house women rather than that all new facilities will be constructed. In order to remedy deteriorating foundations and mold inside walls the buildings would need to be taken down to the ground regardless. The \$100 million in AB900 funds from the state are supposed to be for new construction only. Through this project L.A. County will be challenging the stipulations of AB900 in order to save money and put women in unacceptable living quarters.
- **Potential lack of water / adjudication:** As noted throughout the Initial Study, the Antelope Valley is water-stressed area. Water in the area has been the subject of a fifteen-year prolonged

adjudication process to figure out if property owners or public water suppliers have the rights to the scarce amount of water available. Adding over 1,600 incarcerated women and hundreds of workers to the site will lead to increased water demand at a time when the region needs less demand on groundwater, not more. The water needed for this project will inevitably be taken from other local users. How many gallons a water a year will the new facility use and who will be responsible for the excessive costs?

In addition to the specific harms associated with housing people on contaminated land, enormous amounts of research and the testimony of scholars, policy analysts, criminal justice experts, social and health workers, and current and former prisoners show that imprisonment is bad for mental, physical, family, and community health. As one study puts it, “The incarceration experience often contributes to a downward cycle of economic dependence, social isolation, substance abuse, and other physical and mental health problems.”¹ In contrast, alternatives that reduce the jail population—such as drug treatment, mental health support, affordable housing, education and job placement—interrupt these cycles and build healthier communities. These alternatives are clear, concrete, and can be implemented almost immediately while reducing costs.

Over the last year, thousands of L.A. County residents, many of whom have had their families harmed by imprisonment, have voiced deep concern about construction of a new women’s jail. We join them in urging you to enact sustainable solutions to the real problems our communities face.

Sincerely,

CURB and the Los Angeles No More Jails Coalition

For more information please contact: Diana Zuñiga, Statewide Organizer
1137 E. Redondo Blvd. ,Inglewood, CA 90302 - [213-864-8931](tel:213-864-8931) (c)

Cc:

Michael D. Antonovich, Supervisor
Email: FifthDistrict@lacbos.org
Fax: 213-974-1010

Gloria Molina, Supervisor
Email: molina@bos.lacounty.go
Fax: 213-613-1739

Mark Ridley-Thomas, Supervisor
Email: MarkRidley-Thomas@bos.lacounty.gov
Fax: 213-680-3283

Zev Yaroslavsky, Supervisor
Email: zev@bos.lacounty.gov
Fax: 213-625-7360

¹ *Adverse Effects of US Jail and Prison Policies on the Health and Well-Being of Women of Color*, Dr. Nicholas Freudenberg. Distinguished Professor of Urban Public Health at Hunter College, City University of New York.

Don Knabe, Supervisor
Email: don@bos.lacounty.gov
Fax: 213-626-6941