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Feb. 15, 2019

Board President Richard Valle
Alameda County Board of Supervisors
County of Alameda Administration Building
1221 Oak Street #536
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Board President Richard Valle and Honorable Board of Supervisors,

Over the last decade, California has stood out as a progressive leader in criminal justice reform. With legislative work still on the horizon, Californians have already approved major initiatives that have drastically reduced incarcerated populations across our state prisons and county jails. Such significant reforms include the passage of both Propositions 47 and 57. These types of reforms have not only sought to reduce jail populations, but also to enhance transparency and accountability, as well as to build trust and promote community safety by providing counties with valuable taxpayer savings that can be reinvested into crucial rehabilitative programs and resources.

I write now because I'm concerned about troubling reports that have emerged surrounding the Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO). These concerns range from allegations of abuse to an expanding ACSO budget. Alameda County residents deserve full transparency and accountability, and I fully support community members in their request for an independent financial and performance audit of the ACSO. I respectfully urge you to do so as well.

The Alameda County jail population has decreased significantly in recent years, yet Sheriff Gregory Ahern's budget has grown by \$144 million in the past decade, reaching a cumulative amount of \$443 million this year¹. In its fiscal oversight role, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors has an important

¹ County of Alameda FINAL BUDGET 2018-2019
<http://acgov.org/MS/OpenBudget/pdf/FY18-19/FY%202018-19%20Final%20Budget%20Book-Web%20Version-Final.pdf>

responsibility to ensure that the ASCO is spending public funds wisely, particularly in the wake of several in-custody deaths and costly lawsuits², along with allegations of abuse and mistreatment of women.

In the last five years, ASCO has experienced 33 in-custody deaths³. In June, two in-custody deaths occurred in Santa Rita Jail within the span of just three days, including one mentally ill inmate who died from drinking too much water.

In addition, there was the tragic death of Jessica St. Louis, a 26-year-old mother who was found dead at a BART station. She died just hours after being released late at night from Santa Rita Jail. In response to the systematic failures that lead to Jessica's death, I worked closely with community members to introduce legislation to end late-night release for women across the state.

Since 2014, 29 women have come forward with civil suits against ACSO, alleging abuse and mistreatment. This includes a pregnant mother who was forced to give birth alone in a dirty cell while guards ignored her screams⁴. We can no longer excuse such conduct as an isolated incident. A strong performance audit will generate crucial evaluative data that can thoroughly assess all current practices and policies while provide lifesaving recommendations for implementation. I am committed to supporting you in implementing this very important initiative.

Sincerely,



Nancy Skinner
Senator, 9th Senate District

² Morris, Scott. "Alameda County Leads Region in Civil Rights Payouts" East Bay Express. July 11, 2018. <https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/alameda-county-leads-region-in-civil-rights-payouts/Content?oid=17991968>

³ Bernal, Jose. "Opinion: Audit Actions of Alameda County Sheriff's Office". The Mercury News. January 15, 2019. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/01/15/opinion-audit-actions-of-alameda-county-sheriffs-office/>

⁴ Fernandez, Lisa & Nguyen, Candice. "Woman sue Santa Rita over humiliating treatment; sheriff says facility is 'best big jail in nation'" Fox KTVU News. November 14th, 2018. <http://www.ktvu.com/news/women-sue-alameda-county-jail-over-humiliating-treatment-sheriff-says-facility-is-best-in-nation>