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## **Communities Not Cages - March 27th Email and Phone Call-In Campaign!**

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### **What You Can Do!**

1. Sign Up to Testify Against the New Jail: [bit.ly/Mar27NoNewJailSignUp](http://bit.ly/Mar27NoNewJailSignUp)
2. Use this Toolkit to contact your County Commissioner: [bit.ly/Mar27Toolkit](http://bit.ly/Mar27Toolkit)
  - a. Toolkit includes: Talking Points! Contact Info! Email Scripts! And More!
3. Email and/or Call Your Commissioner on Thursday, March 27 telling them NO NEW JAIL!
  - a. If it's an email, CC Communities Not Cages at: [cnchtown \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:cnchtown@gmail.com)
4. Show up at Commissioners Court in person on March 27 at 10 am
  - a. 1001 Preston, Houston, TX 77002
  - b. Transportation Assistance Available!
5. Share this Call to Action with your network!

### **Signing-up for in-person Public Comment**

**In order to speak at a meeting, you must register [online here](#) or in-person at the meeting location at least one hour before the meeting (by 9 a.m. on Thursday 03/27/25).**

Unfortunately, phone or virtual testimony is not allowed; you must attend in person to speak. Comments for each agenda item are taken in the order of registration, so if you want to spend less time at the meeting, **sign up immediately!**

You have the right to request an interpreter for your comment on the registration form.

You will get to speak earlier if you sign up for a specific agenda item. Agendas are [posted here](#) the Friday before the meeting. For “subject matter,” write “#29: against new jail.”

## **In-person Public Comment Day-of Logistics**

The Commissioners’ Court meeting begins at **10 a.m. on the 1st floor of 1001 Preston Street** (County Administration Building) on Thursday 03/27/25.

You will need to put your belongings through an x-ray machine and walk through a metal detector. You can bring in drinks but will be asked to take a sip of them to show they are actually drinks. You will not be asked for ID. Check-in with the person managing the list of speakers right after security and your name will be called when it is your turn to speak. Unfortunately you will need to come back through security if you leave to use the restroom, etc.

It is likely that we will have to wait a while to give public comments. You can sit inside the meeting room and watch, or sit in the lobby where the audio from the meeting is also projected.

## **Options for People Who Cannot Attend in Person:**

- **Submit a written comment**
  - Email a written comment to [CommissionersCourt@hctx.net](mailto:CommissionersCourt@hctx.net) and cc [cnchtown@gmail.com](mailto:cnchtown@gmail.com) before the meeting for it to be entered into the record.
- **Contact your commissioner directly**
  - [Search your address to find which Commissioner represents you](#)
  - Call or email their office (you can leave a message if you call after their business hours). [Contact info here.](#)
  - Tell them your name (full, or just your first name), that you are one of their constituents, and any other important information you feel comfortable sharing, such as your neighborhood, civic clubs you’re a member of, organizations you represent etc.
  - Use the talking points below to explain why you are against a new Harris County jail
- **Post and tag on social media**
  - Suggested language (we highly recommend personalizing/slightly tweaking!)
    - Prepare a **1 minute** testimony. They will cut you off, so practice the timing.
    - See below for talking points
  - Tag Commissioners on Social Media
    - County Judge Lina Hidalgo: @HarrisCoJudge @LinaHidalgoTX
    - Precinct 1 County Commissioner Rodney Ellis: @hcpct1 @CommissionerRodneyEllis

- Precinct 2 County Commissioner Adrian Garcia: @HarrisCoPct2  
@AdrianGarciaHTX
  - Precinct 3 County Commissioner Tom S. Ramsey: @HarrisCoPct3  
@CommissionerTomRamsey
  - Precinct 4 County Commissioner Lesley Briones: @HCPrecinct4  
@Lesley\_Briones\_
- [Share this toolkit!](#)

## **How to Contact Your Commissioners**

- **Email/Call Your Commissioner Directly**

- **IF EMAILING** - CC [cnchtown@gmail.com](mailto:cnchtown@gmail.com) on the email so we can track how many emails are going out!
- [Search your address to find which Commissioner represents you](#)
- Call or email their office (you can leave a message if you call after their business hours).

<b>Elected Official</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
County Judge Hidalgo	Countywide	<a href="mailto:judge.hidalgo@cj.o.hctx.net">judge.hidalgo@cj.o.hctx.net</a>	(713) 274-7000
Commissioner Ellis	Precinct 1	<a href="mailto:Comm_Ellis@cp1.hctx.net">Comm_Ellis@cp1.hctx.net</a>	(713) 274-1000
Commissioner Garcia	Precinct 2	<a href="mailto:commissioner@pct2.hctx.net">commissioner@pct2.hctx.net</a>	713-274-2222 or 713-755-6220
Commissioner Ramsey	Precinct 3	<a href="mailto:pct3@pct3.com">pct3@pct3.com</a>	(713) 274-3000
Commissioner Briones	Precinct 4	<a href="mailto:service@hcp4.net">service@hcp4.net</a>	(832) 927-4444

- Tell them your name (full, or just your first name), that you are one of their constituents, and any other important information you feel comfortable sharing, such as your neighborhood, civic clubs you're a member of, organizations you represent etc.
- Use the talking points below to explain why you are against a new Harris County jail!

- **Post and tag on social media**

- Suggested language (we highly recommend personalizing/slightly tweaking!)
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  - Precinct 1 County Commissioner Rodney Ellis: @hcpct1 @RodneyEllis

- Precinct 2 County Commissioner Adrian Garcia: @HarrisCoPct2 @AdrianGarciaHTX
- Precinct 3 County Commissioner Tom S. Ramsey: @HarrisCoPct3 @TomSRamsey2
- Precinct 4 County Commissioner Lesley Briones: @HCPrecinct4 @LesleyBrionesTX

## **Other Ways to Help**

- [Repost these social media graphics](#) on March 27th!
- [Use this email template](#) to share the Call to Action to listservs and organizations you are part of!
- **Share this toolkit!** - [bit.ly/Mar27Toolkit](https://bit.ly/Mar27Toolkit)

## **Email Talking Points**

**Feel free to use any of these talking points in your email!**

After years of failing to take common-sense steps against over-incarceration, Harris County is now seriously considering using taxpayer dollars to build a new jail. One possibility on the table is a proposal to expand the jail from 10,000 to almost 16,000. The County has assembled a task force, the Jail Governance Advisory Committee, to address whether it should revamp the current jail or double down in building a whole new jail facility. This project is estimated to cost Harris County residents nearly \$7 billion. This year alone, over \$200 million has gone into the local jail. Instead of serving the community with housing, debt relief, or investing in flood control, the County has decided that its community members would be best served in a new larger jail.

### **Expensive and Bad Use of Taxdollars**

- [Over half](#) of the Harris County budget already goes to the criminal legal system, including policing and incarceration. A new jail will consume billions of tax dollars, further starving the programs we really need, such as affordable housing, public transportation, HART, libraries, public health, and disaster relief.
- The cost of this facility is not just the original price tag - the operating costs will severely limit the County budget for the indefinite future.
- From a climate perspective, Harris County residents have had to endure through climate injustice from more frequent and dangerous power outages (e.g. last year's Derecho and Hurricane Beryl), ever present flooding, and stronger wind storms. Harris County needs increased and sustained tax dollar investment into climate resiliency.
  - Houston and Harris County has been scarred from ERCOT's failure to keep the lights and heat on during winter storms. Just this week, we just went through another polar vortex (a week after the [first one of the year](#)), and folks continue to fear that they won't have power. Investments into shoring up our power

distribution lines is critical especially with our elderly, disabled, and vulnerable communities.

- Houston and Harris County also face a long term existential threat of [sinking into the Gulf of Mexico](#) and becoming 'Greater Galveston Bay' by 2100.
  - We are currently seeing the expensive outcome of delayed action. With Jakarta, Indonesia [sinking into the ocean](#), officials are now making the difficult decision to move the capital hundreds of miles away to Nusantara, Indonesia.
- All of this will **Shackle Houston To Debt**.

## Harmful

- Between 2021 and 2024, 78 people died in Harris County custody, an average of over 19 per year. (Texas Jail Project data)
  - [Rory Ward](#), a man with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, died in the Harris County Jail a year after an arrest that began with him shoplifting two items worth a total of \$3.16.
- Since 2014, [46 percent](#) of the 114 individuals who died of unnatural causes in the custody of Houston-area jails had a documented mental health concern.
- Cruelty is inherent to jails. Over the last 4 years, there have been [810 incidents](#) of detention officers punching detained individuals in the head, an average of almost 4 per week. Many of these were in response to non-violent behaviors, including refusing verbal orders, verbal threats. In one case the person was crouched in a corner covering his head.
  - Incarceration is [torture](#) (National Institutes of Health)
- Around the country, misguided leaders take advantage of communities' care for each other by telling them that a newer, "nicer," jail is the humanitarian choice. Repeatedly, this misinformation is used as an excuse to lock up more of our community members, who continue to experience trauma, injury, and death in jail regardless of how new the facility is.
- By increasing bed space for incarceration in Harris County, President Trump's mass deportation plans will be that much easier to execute. For this to work, the federal government will need additional space to hold immigrants in urban centers while preparing their removals - the easiest of which is using existing structures like a county jail. We have already seen ICE and DHS start bidding for constructing new detention facilities, the state of Texas offer land along the Mexico/U.S. border to construct new detention facilities, and notorious private prison company (e.g. Core Civic, GEO Group) executives salivate at the prospect for record business to construct new facilities.
- Any way you look at it, a **New Jail will result in the Same Deaths**.

## Unnecessary

- Community groups have for years proposed [policies and programs](#) that provide alternatives to arrest, shorten detention times, and address the root causes of social issues. Harris County has failed to implement these common sense solutions.

- As of January 2025, [79%](#) of people in Harris County custody have mental health issues or intellectual or developmental disabilities. Some do not understand their case or why they are detained at all.
- Family members of people with mental health issues are desperate for programs that treat them. However, they are repeatedly told that these programs do not exist or are unavailable, forcing them to wait until a situation escalates to a dangerous encounter with law enforcement. In 2003, the state cut [\\$101 million](#) from community mental health programs and limited their eligibility. After people who haven't been able to access preventative treatment are arrested, they [often wait months or years](#) to be transferred from jail to a state psychiatric facility.
- If in 2023 we had reduced the average length of stay in the jail by 5 days, it would have meant 832 fewer people in custody – 56% of people we have outsourced right now. [\(6/25/24 Harris County Commissioners Court meeting\)](#)

## **Countering Common Harris County Judge and Commissioner Arguments:**

- **Common County Argument #1: “What else would you fund with this to protect the people of Harris County?”**
  - **Counter:**
    - Affordable Housing
    - Continuity of care for those who are incarcerated
    - Life affirming mental health treatment in a non-carceral setting
- **Common County Argument #2: “A New Jail with proper investment would fix a lot of the problems the current jail is facing”**
  - **Counter:**
    - We’ve seen new construction promised as a magical “fix all” to jail problems across the country. Time and again new construction makes the pre-existing problems in the jail worse because it is not a “solution” to any of the underlying problems.
    - New construction means even more beds for an already understaffed jail system. How will this make things better?
- **Common County Argument #3: “We talked with people who are currently or formerly incarcerated and they even want a new jail with proper investment”**
  - **Counter:**
    - Restate our facts and shame on elected officials to twist the feelings of those harmed by the carceral system

### **Talking Points For Commissioner Tom Ramsey**

- During the Dec 10, 2024 Commissioners Court Meeting, Commissioner Ramsey stated **“Commends the sheriff for 3,600 inmates in 2023 were coordinated with ICE from**

**the jail. In 2024 so far - 3300 transferred to ICE custody from our jail. The relationship that our county and jail has with ICE is very encouraging!”.**

- Remarks like this suggest that any expansion of jail bed space will create opportunities for local law enforcement and ICE to ensnare more immigrants to keep bed space full while also fulfilling President Trump’s mass deportation plan and Governor Abbot’s Operation Lone Star.

### **Talking Points For Commissioner Lesley Briones**

- Commissioner Briones, you have openly shared your proud heritage of being from the Rio Grande Valley, for being a Latina, and representing Precinct 4, a heavily Latine populated district of Harris County.
  - During the Dec 10, 2024 Commissioners Court Meeting, Commissioner Briones stated **“If we're going to plan for the A+ jail then we're never going to have the funding for programming”.**
    - By supporting a jail and wanting a “A+ Jail” you are betraying the Latine community.

## **Email Example Scripts**

If you need help drafting your email to your Commissioner, feel free to use the samples provided below. You can also adapt different pieces of the messaging section above to create a personalized statement.

### **Sample Testimony 1:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I live in precinct \_\_\_\_, (Find which precinct you live in using [this link](#)) and I’m writing to you today to encourage you to stand against the expansion of the county jail. The county needs to invest in programs that lower the jail population, moving us away from over-criminalization and into a supportive network. Public funds should be used to create programs and services outside the carceral system. Creating a new facility will not resolve the root cause of crime, it will allow the police and the DA to aggressively fill those new cells with individuals whose needs are not being met. The money earmarked for a new jail could provide socioeconomic programs such as housing, mental health facilities, job training, education, domestic shelters, food programs, and child care, all of which deter crime and relieve the need for a new jail. **There is no such thing as a humane jail because an A+ jail is designed to fail.**

### **Sample Testimony 2:**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I live in precinct \_\_\_\_, (Find which precinct you live in using [this link](#)) and I’m writing to you today to encourage you to stand against the expansion of the county jail. We are overburdening the Sheriff by making Harris County Jail the largest mental health provider in Texas. These services need to be administered by medical



professionals outside of a carceral setting. The majority of individuals incarcerated suffer from mental health issues and the county's response is to criminalize mental illness. The only solution discussed is building a new jail that will provide inadequate services. Often time the services provided in jail are insufficient and lead to individual self-harm, suicide, and preventable deaths. Instead of building a new jail, the county can build a facility that provides the mental health care needed before individuals are arrested because there is no availability in public facilities for treatment. This would save the county so much money if it invested in our community members struggling to get the treatment they deserve. **There is no such thing as a humane jail because an A+ jail is designed to fail.**

**Sample draft notes for Nicole:**

**I'm invest in community based solutions that are outside of the jail**

**Solutions are found deep in the community outside of the jail system. Community based care, (different initiatives) Resources for mental health and communities, these resources are not available to everyone, unless you are incarcerated. I want to see Harris County invest in Mental health programs that are not tied to jails. Or the fact that you need to be arrested to receive these services this is completely backwards and unhelpful to those outside the carceral system.**