For Immediate Release – Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Alameda County residents rally against $81 million expansion to deadly jail

Calling out an undemocratic budget process and the escalating crisis of homelessness, mental illness, and jail deaths.

Press Contact:
Tash Nguyen, Restore Oakland Inc., tash@restoreoakland.org, 408-499-7912

Oakland - On Tuesday morning, June 13th, over 75 residents and members of the Care First Community Coalition held a rally and funeral procession outside the Alameda County Administration Building to demand Supervisors stop the $81 million expansion at Santa Rita Jail, where at least 5 people have died this year. “We are in the belly of the beast--Alameda County is funding an escalating crisis of criminalization, homelessness, and mental illness. We are resisting this jail expansion and fighting for the healing we want to see” said Tash Nguyen of Restore Oakland Inc. who emceed the rally. The group – made up of community organizations, faith leaders, legal advocates, and family members of those who have died in the jail – has called for $171 million to be invested in housing and community-based mental health care.

Family members of those who have died in jail pointed out that adding more resources and facilities to the jail will not solve the complex issues of public safety in the East Bay. Barbara Doss, the mother of Dujuan Armstrong, a 24 year old who died in 2018 at Santa Rita Jail stated, “we have a mental health crisis going on in our jail system, and you want to give them [Alameda County Sheriff’s Department] money? I don’t think so! Give it to mental health care, give it to the people who don’t have homes, give it to the people in Santa Rita to get out of Santa Rita!”

Citing the fact that the jail population has significantly declined over the last decade, protesters demanded that supervisors take the $26.6 million in county funds slated for jail expansion, and instead invest them into life-affirming resources and programming outside the jail that have proven to improve public health and safety. “The county found the $81 million to fund a jail expansion, but does not have funds for the mental health services they’d promised two years ago." said John Lindsay-Poland of American Friends Service Committee. He continues “ The problem is not finding the money, the problem is political will, so it is up to us to create that political will now, and going forward.”

At a County Special Meeting later in the day, County Administrator Muranishi expressed concern that the county would not be able to implement the *Babu* consent decree that called for vastly increased jail staffing for a larger jail population - on which the jail expansion is premised.

On May 18th, CA State Senator Nancy Skinner wrote a letter directed to the county Board, with a dozen pointed questions, including whether the expansion would include mental health treatment, whether the County consulted the Care First Task Force, Mental Health Advisory Board, or community groups, annual costs, and why the plan’s costs increased so much. The County has yet to respond to the Senator’s letter. Members of the county’s own Care First Jails Last Task force expressed serious concern about the jail expansion last month and will vote on a statement opposing it next week.

As the public awaits response from the board of supervisors, the Care First Community Coalition urged residents, community and faith groups, service providers and others to press for these investments, leading up to the Supervisors budget deliberations in the week of June 26. The coalition will be attending county budget meetings to demand the county halt the jail expansion and invest in housing and mental health solutions.

Photos available via Brooke Anderson