

September 12 , 2025

To: Commission Streamlining Task Force

Re: Keep the Sheriff Department Oversight Board

Dear Members of the Commission Streaming Task Force:

On behalf of the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office, I write to express our support for maintaining the Sheriff Department Oversight Board.

The Sheriff’s Department carries out its work in a setting that is largely shielded from public view, and incarcerated people are among the most vulnerable members of our community. People detained in our jails, the majority of whom are our clients, are impoverished, suffer from trauma, and have mental health challenges and/ or physical impairments. In the absence of meaningful oversight, the potential for mistreatment or neglect increases. Independent oversight is therefore a critical safeguard to further promote safety and ensure accountability.

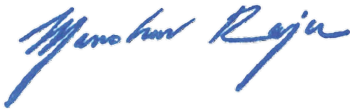
San Francisco has experienced firsthand the consequences of insufficient accountability. In 2015, alarming reports revealed that sheriff deputies coerced incarcerated people to participate in “gladiator-style” fights. The scandal eroded public confidence in our jail system and highlighted the urgent need for meaningful oversight. It was in response to this moment that the late Public Defender, Jeff Adachi, advocated for the creation of an independent Sheriff oversight body. In response, Supervisor Shamann Walton introduced a Charter Amendment in 2020 to establish the Sheriff’s Department Oversight Board. The Charter Amendment passed with the support of nearly 67% of San Francisco voters.

Today, violence in our jails remains a serious concern, affecting both those who are incarcerated as well as sheriff staff. Our office has filed numerous complaints on behalf of our clients who have reported abuse and mistreatment—matters that deserve careful attention of the oversight board. In addition, within the past two years, three individuals, all of whom were black, have died while in San Francisco jails.

San Francisco should be focused on strengthening the Sheriff’s Department Oversight Board—beginning with the appointment of a new independent Inspector General—so that it can fulfill its mandate effectively, rather than eliminating it.

Although the oversight board has had a gradual start, this body has the potential to provide San Franciscans, including the families of those incarcerated, with transparency into how our jails are managed and with accountability when there are abuses. To eliminate the Board would mean to disregard a decade of painful lessons and to leave one of the city's most powerful agencies free of independent scrutiny. I urge you to keep the Sheriff Oversight Board as a city entity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Manohar Raju". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Manohar" and the last name "Raju" clearly distinguishable.

Manohar Raju  
San Francisco Public Defender