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OVERSIGHT PRESIDENT CALLS FOR TRANSPARENCY, CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE, AND PAROLE-HEARING ACCESS

San Francisco Sheriff's Department Oversight Board urges the San Francisco Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors to adopt a state-local access protocol, independent review of lockdowns and program disruptions, and evidence-based parole decisions

"Public safety is not served by secrecy, avoidable idleness, or keeping people confined beyond what the law and evidence justify. We are not asking for favors. We are demanding lawful decisions, transparent reasons, and accountable institutions."

SAN FRANCISCO – The San Francisco Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (SDOB), today called for a coordinated transparency and constitutional-compliance initiative addressing state parole hearings, prison overcrowding, and allegations that staffing disputes are contributing to recurring lockdowns, canceled programming, or restricted family contact.

"When a prison responds to staffing pressure by repeatedly locking down housing units or eliminating rehabilitative programming, the public deserves verified facts: what happened, who made the decision, whether safety required it, and what corrective action will prevent it from becoming routine," William M. Palmer, II, President of the SDOB said. *"No labor dispute, budget pressure, or institutional custom should be allowed to eclipse constitutional duties."*

Palmer emphasized that California's overcrowding crisis has already produced a landmark constitutional ruling. In *Brown v. Plata*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld an order requiring California's prison population to be reduced to 137.5 percent of design capacity after finding that overcrowding was the primary cause of unconstitutional medical and mental health care. The issue, Palmer said, is not indiscriminate release. It is whether the State is applying existing parole laws honestly, consistently, and on an individualized record.

A Concrete Oversight Agenda

- The SDOB urges the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors to establish a formal observer-access protocol with the California Board of Parole Hearings for designated San Francisco oversight representatives, consistent with state law, confidentiality protections, victim rights, and the Board's existing approval process.
- Create a transparent tracking process for parole hearings involving people whose cases originated in San Francisco, using lawful, nonconfidential data to identify delays, deferrals, recurring rationales, and systemic barriers.
- Request an independent, documented review of recurring lockdowns, canceled programs, visiting restrictions, staffing levels, overtime controls, and population pressures at facilities housing significant numbers of San Francisco residents.
- Publish clear performance measures covering access to medical care, mental health care, food, hygiene, programming, family contact, disciplinary due process, and preparation for reentry.
- The SDOB urges the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors to convene state, local, community, victim-services, reentry, labor, and formerly incarcerated stakeholders to negotiate practical reforms rather than allowing public debate to collapse into fear, slogans, or unverified accusation.

Parole Must Be Based on Evidence, Not Permanent Punishment

California law already provides specialized parole review for qualifying elderly and youth offenders and requires individualized consideration of relevant, reliable evidence. Eligibility is not an automatic release order, and public safety remains the controlling question. But a denial must be more than a label. It should explain, with evidence, why a person currently presents an unreasonable danger despite age, time served, rehabilitation, risk assessments, disciplinary history, release plans, and other relevant factors.

"Accountability means honoring the sentence and honoring the law that governs what happens after the sentence has been served," Palmer said. "Parole is not a gift, and review is not amnesty. The State must distinguish past harm from present risk. When it cannot explain that difference, continued confinement becomes harder to defend and public trust suffers."

A Lawful Path to Access

The San Francisco Charter authorizes the SDOB to compile and recommend custodial best practices, receive community input on Sheriff's Department operations and jail conditions, and hold hearings, issue subpoenas, and take testimony in performing its duties. The Charter also requires City agencies to provide prompt and full cooperation, subject to state and federal law. The SDOB also encourages the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors to seek a written state-local agreement for lawful observation, data sharing, and policy review.

The California Board of Parole Hearings currently allows its executive officer or designee to authorize public observers for educational purposes and may authorize credentialed members of the media to attend under state regulations. The SDOB urges the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors to ask the State to create a defined pathway for qualified civilian oversight officials to observe appropriate hearings, protect confidential information, and report on process integrity without advocating the outcome of an individual case.

Call to Action

In his individual capacity, Palmer previously called on the Governor, CDCR, the Board of Parole Hearings, San Francisco officials, and community partners to begin negotiations on the access protocol and transparency agenda within 30 days.

"California can protect victims, respect due process, support correctional staff, reduce unlawful conditions, and make sound release decisions at the same time," Palmer said. "The answer is disciplined oversight: open the process, measure the outcomes, explain the decisions, and correct what the evidence shows is broken. I am prepared to bring the parties to the table and do that work."

About the Sheriff's Department Oversight Board

San Francisco voters established the seven-member Sheriff's Department Oversight Board in 2020. The Board evaluates the work of the Office of Sheriff's Inspector General, recommends law enforcement custodial and patrol best practices, conducts community outreach, and receives input concerning Sheriff's Department operations and jail conditions, and reports to the Sheriff and Board of Supervisors.

Sources for Editors

1. **San Francisco Charter, Section 4.137.** Defines SDOB and OSIG powers, duties, subpoenas, access, and interagency cooperation. https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/san_francisco/latest/sf_charter/0-0-0-52923
2. **California Board of Parole Hearings: Who May Attend.** Describes approval procedures for public observers and credentialed media. <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/bph/parole-suitability-hearings-overview/who-may-attend-a-parole-suitability-hearing/>
3. **California Board of Parole Hearings: Elderly Parole.** Summarizes eligibility and special-consideration requirements under Penal Code section 3055. <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/bph/elderly-parole-hearings-overview/>
4. **Brown v. Plata, 563 U.S. 493 (2011).** U.S. Supreme Court decision concerning overcrowding and the 137.5-percent design-capacity cap. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/563/493/>
5. **CDCR Population Reports.** Current weekly and monthly institution-level population reporting. <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/population-reports-2/>