VOICES FROM INSIDE
SF JAILS:
Shut Down 850 NOW!

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS from PEOPLE CAGED in
SAN FRANCISCO’S COUNTY JAILS

Nonewsjail.org
Spring 2020
No New SF Jail Coalition is a group of community members, SF residents, and organizations working together to stop the expansion and violence of policing and jailing in San Francisco. In May 2020, the No New SF Jail Coalition successfully passed an ordinance through City Council to permanently close County Jail 4 at 850 Bryant by November 1st, 2020.

We know that cages, and the use of policing and imprisonment, do not solve harm and conflict but rather create and worsen violence and inequality.

To centralize the experiences, insights, needs and voices of the people currently caged in San Francisco’s jails, the coalition interviewed prisoners. The resulting statements excerpted from No New SF Jails’ interviews detail prisoners’ individual experiences inside the jail system, and what they think should be done in closing 850 Bryant. The prisoners interviewed have been held in different jail sites for different lengths of time.

The people currently inside San Francisco’s jails uplift their resilience in the face of inhumane and torturous conditions. Their voices fuel the coalition’s demands in both fighting against criminalization and fighting for strong and healthy communities:

1. **Shut Down 850!** and incrementally release everyone from 850 Bryant in preparation for complete closure by June 2020

2. **No Out-of-County Transfers of Imprisoned People**

3. **No New Jails** (or Jail Beds or Jail Expansion Projects of any kind)

4. **Stop Increases to Electronic Monitoring**

5. **End Quality-of-Life Policing**

6. **Prioritize Life-Affirming Resources, Not Carceral Infrastructure**

7. **Housing for All**

8. **Increase Equity and Access to Social & Medical Services**

9. **Strengthen Employment Pathways & Access to Living Wages**

10. **Build Community Resources & Community Spaces**

For explanation on each of these points in our **10 Point Platform**, visit our website: nonewsfjail.org/about
TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND & CONDITIONS OF 850 BRYANT ........................................................................................................... 4

PRISONERS’ VOICES............................................................................................................................................. 5

BUILDING A BETTER SF, FOR EVERYONE ............................................................................................................. 12

SAN FRANCISCO’S JAIL SYSTEM & WHO IS MOST IMPACTED ........................................................................... 14

HOW TO SUPPORT THE NO NEW SF JAIL COALITION .................................................................................. 17

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ................................................................................................................................... 18

BUILD FOR A MORE SECURE FUTURE:
INVEST IN QUALITY SCHOOLS, EMPLOYMENT, INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, FUNDING FOR COLLEGE, COMMUNITY GARDENS, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, BUILD AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF POSSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY.

NO NEW SAN FRANCISCO JAIL!!
BACKGROUND & CONDITIONS OF 850 BRYANT

850 Bryant was built in 1958. In 1996 the entire building was marked for demolition as it is seismically unsafe and puts people held in the jail and staff at grave risk, especially when a major earthquake occurs.

In January of 2017, eight major unions in San Francisco filed a letter to the City Attorney claiming that the city would be liable for injury or death in the case of an earthquake. Later that year, City Administrator Naomi Kelly reinforced the calls of community, engineers, and other city leaders by naming a closure date of end of 2019. Despite this, city leaders have not planned or acted to close the jail and prevent such a tragedy.

Folks inside of County Jail 4 continue to report dangerous health conditions that reveal the building must be closed immediately and permanently. Reports include noxious fumes and poor air quality, rat infestations, severe sewage leaks, flooding and asbestos.

Due to such dangerous conditions, 850 Bryant – also known as the Hall of Justice – has been named the “Hall of Horrors” by CBS news.

In the Sheriff’s own words: “850 Bryant needs to close.”
PRISONERS’ VOICES

In more recent years, most people imprisoned in County Jail 4 at 850 Bryant have been locked up there temporarily, awaiting transfer to another jail or prison, if convicted and sentenced to prison-time. Some people are kept in CJ 4 for days, some weeks, months or even years.

Prisoners in County Jails (CJ) 1, 2 and 4 describe the conditions inside 850 Bryant, how imprisonment of any length affects them and their loved ones, as well as their thoughts on closing 850 Bryant.

Initials are kept for people who did not want their names publicized.

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS LIKE INSIDE SAN FRANCISCO’S JAILS?

L.H. in CJ 2, PREVIOUSLY CJ 4
They’re not good. Everybody was getting stabbed. The flooding and stuff are a whole other thing. Everything is getting soaked. There is a lot of asbestos, or what looks like asbestos, on the pipes. I was in 850 for 17 months.

M.R. in CJ 2
I don’t feel like there’s a blip of care for people. I don’t feel like this is humane. There are no cups for water, we have to drink out of a faucet in the bathroom...The phones are a mess. They are especially hard for ESL speakers. Our right to a phone call is being taken from us. I don’t have my medications and I’m going to miss my job interview. This is the opposite of common sense. This is barbaric and out of date.

T.A. in CJ 2
In holding cell, 8 of us in a cell. You can visibly tell half are homeless or going through withdrawals.

A.G. in CJ 2
It’s hard. Can’t get my meds. There are no blankets. I’m sick and have the shivers. I’ve been homeless for 12 years. It’s really awful to be sick in jail. Can’t get no help. I asked for blankets. They said not now. I asked for meds and they said they couldn’t find it. I just have to wait for someone.

A.C. in CJ 2
Arm was broken by deputies. That’s their job. Taxpayers’ dollars going to work breaking people’s arms.
HOW HAS BEING LOCKED UP AFFECTED YOU AND YOUR FAMILY OR YOUR LOVED ONES?

M.W. in CJ 1
In jail, you’re forced to sleep all day. Jail makes you depressed.

G.M. in CJ 2
My little brother and big sister are in jail too. It’s affecting me a lot emotionally. When I’m here, it feels suffocating. I have nightmares all the time and I’m depressed.

E.R. in CJ 1
Jail gives me anxiety. I sit there all the time with nothing.

M.R. in CJ 2
This is the hardest thing I’ve done because of the lack of medication and therapy. Breathing is hard. I’m not learning how to handle situations [in jail], or how to come off medications. I’m just being tortured. This just aggravates whatever situation it is.

M.W. in CJ 2
Jail has taken me away from people who liked me or loved me. I can’t do my job while at jail, so other people can’t get the food they need for their homes. [M.W. works at grocery mart].

L.H. in CJ 2, previously CJ 4
Pretty bad. Definitely impacted my family. They pretty much gave up on me. They know I’ve been institutionalized and grown apart from me. I mean even when I’m home and taking a shower I keep my boxers on and put my socks on my hands.

K.M. in CJ 2
It keeps breaking up my bond with my child. My child keeps thinking, “why do people keep leaving me and going to jail.”

V.T. in CJ 2
Being in jail is affecting me a lot. I lose my stuff and everything. The first time I was arrested here was March 2018 and I’ve been arrested 8 times total. 3 times just in the month of June 2018. I’m homeless and I stick up for the rights of homeless folks. Not going to stay quiet and allow police to just do things.

J.M. in CJ 4
Jail is counterproductive. Everybody has a journey, and …[jail]. It’s, definitely not doing anything for me. Being charged with burglary even though I didn’t burglarize anything.
L.V. in CJ 1
Getting arrested ills chances of getting hired. I was so hopeful today and looking for a job and now I’m scared. They will just look at the fact that I’ve had handcuffs. They will just look at that history, not my person. My boyfriend has also been in jail. I just feel like it’s so unnecessary sometimes. I understand an adult timeout, but this…. They are just putting fear into people. It’s a scare tactic. My boyfriend was so scared of being deported. You shouldn’t want to scare your residents, you should want to keep them safe.

Z.W. in CJ 1
“I’m sort of in jail all the time even when I’m free just because how life is when you’re poor and shit. But ya it’s [jail] not awesome. All about punishment. The open toilets. I don’t approve of it because of psychology. It’s not like we don’t have the ability to keep people in line in other ways.

850 BRYANT HAS BEEN CITED FOR DEMOLITION SINCE 1996 DUE TO BEING SEISMICALLY UNSAFE. SOME ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE WORKING TO GET THE CITY TO CLOSE 850 BRYANT BY JULY 2020. DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT AND DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT THE JAIL CLOSING?

P. in CJ 4
No I always felt like this wasn’t safe. Ya but didn’t know [about it being earthquake unsafe]. I feel like my rights are violated.

L.H. in CJ 2, previously CJ 4
I didn’t know. I’ve been there when there was an earthquake. The cops just run and can’t even open the doors. They all disappear and go downstairs...It’d be nice to not be up 7 floors anymore.
It’s kind of scary especially because now I know it’s not earthquake safe. I even worried about it before. That jail [CJ 4] is the worst one [in the SF jail system].

L.V. in CJ 1
Wow, that’s bad especially here in California. Things should be earthquake unsafe especially in California. And the inmates don’t even have a choice. Forcing someone to be in an unsafe space is about the worst. If you’re locked in a cell and things fall on you and you can’t get out...that’s the most terrifying place to me. It doesn’t matter if it’s not me, it’s human lives!

Z.W. in CJ 1
It sounds very American and hypocritical. In a city known for earthquakes and the jail isn’t safe for earthquakes! I mean I’m a Katrina survivor, so I’m used to it. They still have the official dead count for Katrina at 10,000 or something when it’s actually way more.”

A.C. in CJ 2, previously CJ 4
Felt tremble of an earthquake while inside. Heard and felt the reverberations. A guy woke me up and said “What are we going to do?” I said, “We are dead bodies... Need to have your belief/faith"

A.G. in CJ 2
I’m worried about my son with mental health issues on the street. I’ve been homeless for 12 years

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT PLANS FOR NEW JAILS OR MORE JAIL BEDS?

V.T. in CJ 2
There are already too many [jails]. Why make another one. Tell London Breed to focus more on [decreasing] the police. They are arresting lots of people. They are always by my tent, looking at my things. They are following me everywhere I go and arresting me. In the closure plan, they should make more housing for people. If we don’t make it, people will be homeless. If we don’t make it, people will get out of jail and be on the streets. We need more housing! With money saved from closing the jail, we should make rooms and housing for people who are getting out of jail.

M.W. in CJ 2
Shelter beds are needed. SF doesn’t need a new jail. Costs money to have people and jail and all the lawyers. It’s common sense. If you build more prisons and jails, it will cost more and there will be more people in them.

G.M. in CJ 2
If they build a new jail, they will try to bring more people into it.
Z.W. in CJ 1
If anything, I don’t see a prison as a sustainable addition to a community. If anything, it puts a drain on resources. Between electricity, good, water for the bathrooms.

K.M. in CJ 2
Why would you build another jail? Why not build more housing and jobs? That will make the community better. They need to start housing people getting out of jail, prison, and mental health program, so we’re not just back on the streets. Once they build a new jail, they will fill it with bodies. Then shit like this will happen. I don’t even know why I’m in here. I woke up in the hospital. We need more long-term housing when you get out of programs, especially for domestic violence survivors and moms involved with CPS.

M.R. in CJ 2
It’s 100% more cost effective to give resources like therapy or couples therapy. This [jail] will cost me and the county much more

WHAT DO YOU THINK SAN FRANCISCO NEEDS MORE OF? WHAT STEPS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE CITY’S PLAN TO CLOSURE 850 BRYANT?

P.T. in CJ 4
We need jobs. Need credentials to get jobs and paid job training.

G.M. in CJ 2
Schools, housing. Cleaning up the streets where there is garbage everywhere. Companies that could provide jobs...Mental health support and counseling. For people who are on the streets, it’s emotional and to help people find a job and their medication. When people get out of jail, it’s really hard and can feel pretty weird outside.

L.V. in CJ 1
If they stop arresting and putting so many people in jail, it wouldn’t be a problem and they wouldn’t need a new jail. They could get housing and jobs to prevent people from going to jail. They should divert the money to support a better cause, support people’s lives instead of micromanaging them in this place. People get mad when animals are in cages and then when people in cages they think, “wow they must’ve done something terrible"
SOME MIGHT SAY SAN FRANCISCO ALREADY HAS A LOT OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CITY NEEDS TO IMPROVE TO MAKE THESE MORE EFFECTIVE?

P.T. in CJ 4
More of programs that the city already has, but those only have 30 days in the program. That is just not enough. Also, they have a lot of program for youth, but those end at 25. What if you get out of jail at age 26?

K.M. in CJ 2
I’ve been in programs, residential and treatment programs, and they’re productive, but then I’m let out and I have nowhere to go. Homeless prenatal program, families rising, and the Walden house have all been helpful to me. As well as the homeless advocacy groups. We need more long-term housing when you get out of programs, especially for domestic violence survivors and moms involved with CPS.
J.A. in CJ 2
A place to go when released and food vouchers. I don’t want to go back to the street. St Anthony’s has clothes has decent food and clothes, but most of the clothes are small. Glide is good. They have food, clothes, help pay for an ID, and help getting on the housing list.

L.H. in CJ 2, previously CJ 4
Housing would be one thing. It would be great if there was a job lined up. There are programs in the jail, but I’m (gang) affiliated so I’m limited from those.
BUILDING A BETTER SF, FOR EVERYONE

San Francisco is struggling with a decades-long jail crisis. Increased policing and jailing are San Francisco’s main methods for dealing with social, economic and political problems such as poverty, rising costs of living, lack of affordable housing, unemployment, houselessness, substance use, theft, racial and economic inequality, lack of effective social services and community programs, etc.

Our community consistently unites against the expansion of jailing in San Francisco.

When Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi applied for $80 million from the state to build a new jail in San Francisco in June 2013, residents, families, community members and organizations rallied together and formed the No New SF Jail Coalition to oppose these plans. And in December 2015 after the sheriff got $80 million from the state for a new jail, No New SF Jail Coalition mobilized hundreds of people to pressure city representatives in the Board of Supervisors to unanimously reject the state’s funding, sending back the funds and defeating new jail construction.

In the face of this victory, City leaders have exploited community outcry and No New SF Jail Coalition’s demands for more mental health services. Rather than end the city’s reliance on imprisonment and fully invest in community-based solutions, City leaders have focused on different ways to reform SF’s jail system.

District Attorney George Gascon, for example, released plans for a service-rich “Behavioral Health Justice Center” (essentially a mental health jail) in 2016.

This launched a wave of returning efforts by the City to extend criminalization and imprisonment through “mental health” initiatives. In the months following, the city approved funding for hundreds of new police hires and increased the use of “quality of life” policing, strategies that criminalize San Francisco’s poor and street-based folks. As a result, homelessness, arrests, and San Francisco’s jail population have all increased. Since 2013, No New SF Jail Coalition has continued to work tirelessly to push the City to stop jail expansion in any and all forms, to adopt system-wide alternatives to imprisonment and to recognize as well as provide what our city truly needs: **improved care not cages.**
The coalition’s work to fight the harmful impacts of imprisonment and policing on communities in San Francisco led to a clear need for the City to permanently and immediately close County Jail 4 at the Halls of Justice at 850 Bryant and reform its social services, community programs, housing and health care systems in ways that humanize people rather than criminalize and punish.

Criminalization and punishment exacerbate inequality and disparities, and in turn lead to increased harm.
SAN FRANCISCO’S JAIL SYSTEM & WHO IS MOST IMPACTED

San Francisco’s jail system consists of seven different locations where poor and working class people, most of whom are people of color, are caged. San Francisco’s jail system currently cages the city’s most targeted and vulnerable residents, with an imprisoned population that is:

- **52%** Black
- **40%** Houseless
- **25%** Transitional Aged Youth

Of the entire prisoner population, 30% use of jail mental health services. 82% are being jailed and most would be eligible for release if not for cash bail amounts over $25,000.

According to recent research conducted by the Burns Institute, in 2013 there were a disproportionate number of Black adults represented at every stage of the jailing process. While Black adults represented only 6% of the city’s adult population at that time, they represented 40% of people arrested, 44% of people booked in County Jail, and 40% of people convicted.

In San Francisco, Black adults are 7.1 times more likely than White adults to be arrested, 11 times more likely to be booked into County Jail, and 10.3 times more likely to be convicted.

Additionally, recent research shows the number of Latino adults in the SF jail system by 31 percent between 1994 and 2013, further highlighting the racism and harm of San Francisco’s jail system.
Due to the racist and classist nature of policing and criminalization, it is no surprise that the majority of people inside San Francisco’s jails are from the poorest neighborhoods of the city and are mostly home to families of color, namely the Bayview/Hunters Point, the Tenderloin, SOMA, the Mission, the Excelsior, and Western Addition of the Fillmore.
San Francisco’s Jail System includes five County Jails (CJ 1, 2, 4, 5, & 6) as well as a jail wing of SF General Hospital (the 7th location, CJ 7).

In the beginning of 2020, an average of 1,300 people was locked up in San Francisco’s jails on a daily basis, 300-400 whom were caged in County Jail (CJ) 4 at 850 Bryant. Since COVID-19, the jail population was reduced to the lowest it has been since the 1950’s, below 700 throughout all county jails, with about 150 prisoners inside CJ4 in April. Since May, the jail population has steadily been increasing again, reaching 770 in June 2020.

While all jails cage people in conditions that are harmful and unsafe, as imprisonment dehumanizes people and strips away prisoners’ self-determination, dignity and basic needs, 850 Bryant is particularly dangerous and violent.
HOW TO SUPPORT THE NO NEW SF JAIL COALITION

The city has had over 20 years to act and close the jail. Even though the City has passed our ordinance to close CJ 4 permanently by November 2020, we have not won until 850 Bryant is completely closed, no one is caged inside, and the entire building is no longer used for caging, surveillance, criminalization or policing. A swell of public outcry and collective action will put the final nail in the coffin of 850 Bryant. YOU can help us force the city to put funding and resources toward community resources, not cages!

JOIN the No New SF Jail Coalition:

1. Join as an individual member and resident of San Francisco
   Reach out to us via email at nonewsfjail.outreach@gmail.com with “Join NNSFJ” in the subject line. We will try to get back to you within a week. Before joining a workgroup, we will ask you to do a brief orientation to the history, goals, strategies, and principles of the coalition with two of our current members.

2. Join the coalition as an organization
   Reach out to us via email at nonewsfjail.outreach@gmail.com, with “Organization to Join NNSFJ” in the subject line. We will set up a meeting to understand the ways in which we could maximize the effectiveness of our partnership.

MORE WAYS TO SUPPORT

1. Support Mobilizations & Abolition in Action Series Events
   - Support our upcoming actions and show the city the community will for investment in us. Help us build and display people power!
   - Attend and help promote our Abolition in Action monthly events, held virtually during the COVID crisis.

Nonewsfjail.org/abolition-in-action-series
2. Share Your Story

Share your story with us, in whichever way feels most comfortable, about how jailing, criminalization or policing have impacted you or your loved ones in San Francisco. Make your voice heard about how our city should take action and improve lives.

3. Follow Us on Social Media

Follow the No New San Francisco Jail campaign on social media to find out about all upcoming events and updates.

- Twitter: @ShutDown850
- Instagram: @Shutdown850
- Facebook: No New SF Jail Coalition

4. Subscribe to Our Website for Instant Campaign Updates or Sign Up on our Website to Join Our Announcements Newsletters for Upcoming Events & Actions.

- Subscribe to our website here: nonewsjail.org/updates
  - Enter your email address into the button on the top right-hand side of the Website Page

- Sign up for our newsletter or attend New Member Orientation by filling out the contact form on our website here: nonewsjail.org/contact-us

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The No New SF Jail Coalition has compiled a wealth of resources around jails, policing, and the need for community-based and -led resources. On our website, nonewsjail.org, you can find recent factsheets and full reports on the San Francisco Budget, the state of pretrial detention and jail capacity in California, as well as bilingual resource guides for folks recently released from SF jails navigating COVID, and concrete ways to shift from criminalization and toward community-based resources, and more.