

Executive Board

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SANTA CLARA COUNTY
CORRECTIONAL PEACE OFFICERS'
ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Menon Dixon
Matthew Nichols
Main Jail Complex
Jesus Martinez
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James Darnell
Lt's & Sgt's
Jose Chacon
PEPRA Director

May 16, 2017

Via Electronic & U.S. Mail

David Cortese, President
70 West Hedding Street, 10th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110
dave.cortese@bos.sccgov.org

Re: Childcare and Inmate Safety

Dear Supervisor Cortese,

I want to follow up on my brief comments this afternoon. As I mentioned, it's important for the County budget to include funding for childcare for correctional staff and funding for the Axon pilot program (acquire and test electronic control devices).

First, 24-hour childcare is critical for officer recruit and retention, morale, and wellbeing. My members work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A typical shift starts at either 6 AM or 6 PM and runs for 12 hours. And now, staff are required to work a number of mandatory overtime shifts on top of their normal duties. It is next to impossible for my members to secure affordable childcare for those hours.

As I'm sure you know, childcare responsibilities fall disproportionately on women in many families. Securing at-cost child care is essential to our Department's efforts to recruit and retain correctional staff and women in particular.

Throughout California, departments are competing aggressively with each other to out recruit and retain their best staff. Santa Clara should lead the way and innovate in recruitment and retention incentives that respect the needs of young families and women in particular to achieve a gender balanced and diverse group of correctional staff.

Second, the Board should fund the Axon pilot program (acquire and test electronic control devices) to empower correctional staff with less-than-lethal alternatives in use of force scenarios. Our job as correctional staff centers on keeping inmates safe. But jails are dangerous, especially for impaired and vulnerable inmates. With AB-109 realignment, we now house many more violent inmates, who often seek to abuse and prey upon other inmates perceived of as weak.

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For example, the Mercury News reported that just today an inmate at the Elmwood Correctional Complex “viciously beat his cellmate.” The victim, another inmate, went to the hospital with life-threatening injuries after correctional deputies intervened. In another case just weeks ago, an inmate was stabbed dozens of times, according to ABC7. He was attacked with a make-shift knife and “the stabbing was so brutal the blades were bent in the attack.” Again, correctional deputies stopped the attack and saved the victim’s life.

Often the difference of a few seconds can mean the difference between life and death or lifetime disability, for vulnerable inmates. We need more effective tools to protect inmates. The Axon device fills a critical gap in our ability to respond immediately to violent attacks on vulnerable inmates and on staff.

The Axon pilot program is a modest initiative to test the effectiveness of less-than-lethal techniques in serious use of force scenarios. The research strongly suggests these tools can empower correctional staff to stop assaults on inmates faster and deter other types of inmate violence. This pilot program will allow us to develop a policy in coordination with critical stakeholders to test this widely-used tool in our facilities.

I understand the Board must weigh competing budget priorities. But the Axon pilot project offers the highest potential return on a very modest investment. It is critical that we have these tools to keep inmates safe amid the growing threats to their safety.

Sincerely,

Amy Le
President, Santa Clara County
Correctional Peace Officers' Association

CC: S. Joseph Simitian, District 5, Vice President
CC: Mike Wasserman, District 1
CC: Cindy Chavez, District 2
CC: Ken Yeager, District 4
CC: Sandra J. Poole, Labor Relations Director