

WE HAVE BEEN BAMBOOZLED, HOODWINKED, AND RUN AMOK AT THE SANTA RITA JAIL - PART 1

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We've had too many incidents throughout history where we find that when the system polices itself, that the system protects itself."

- Rev. William J. Barber, II, Co-Chair of Poor People's Campaign

Recently, the East Bay Times reported that the Alameda County Sheriff's Office has refused to release the psychological evaluations and background history of former Alameda County Sheriff Deputy Devin Williams. We, the members of the Santa Rita Jail Freedom Collective, find this refusal to release these records to Devin Williams' defense attorneys to be a violation of the public's trust and another glaring example of the "Blue Wall" that exists inside Santa Rita Jail ("SRJ").

In September 2022, former Alameda County Sheriff Deputy Devin Williams worked a double shift right here inside SRJ. After his shift was over, he went to the house of his estranged girlfriend and executed her and her husband with his service revolver (allegedly). Devin Williams' actions triggered an audit of all psychological evaluations given to Alameda County Sheriff Deputies to include many who work inside SRJ. <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective> (Devin Williams)

Although former Sheriff, Gregory Ahern rushed to reinstate deputies who had originally failed their psychological evaluations, this situation raised many questions about the mental health fitness of deputies who are tasked with interacting with prisoners that suffer from a wide variety of mental illnesses.

WHERE IS THE MONEY GOING?

SRJ is currently under a Consent Decree known as the Babu Consent Decree. Ashok Babu is the lead plaintiff in a class action lawsuit brought against the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, Santa Rita Jail, and others.

The core of the lawsuit is centered around the foul treatment of prisoners at SRJ who have been diagnosed with some form of mental illness.

What really caught my attention was the \$24-82 million dollars awarded to the Alameda County Sheriff's Office for the hiring of staff at SRJ (located in Dublin, California).

What really angered me was how the presiding judge, U.S. District Court Judge Nathaniel Cousins, totally ignored the voices of the community as well as prisoners at SRJ who objected to the settlement of Babu and pleaded for patience and more time to thoroughly assess the situation.

I'd like to direct your attention to the Declaration of Professor Daniela Kantorova, Document Number 381-6 in Babu v. Alameda County Sheriff's Office, et al., Case No. 5:18-cv-07677-NC. I share with you an enlightening excerpt (Attachment A, page 1 – ER-1395) of Professor Kantorova's "Expert Opinion Supporting the proposed Class Action Settlement and Consent Decree (you can find this document on our web page at <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective>

Professor Kantorova states:

"The consent decree recommends that people experiencing severe functional impairment in the jail are transferred to the John George psychiatric hospital. This practice has already been in place; however, there is no evidence that it has been working; moreover, the recent report by Department of Justice, Investigation of Alameda County, John George Psychiatric Hospital and Santa Rita Jail from April 22, 2021, identified a need for community based services and mental health diversion."

Now, allow me to briefly share with you a quote from the Department of Justice ("DOJ") report referenced by our esteemed sister, Professor Kantorova, who happens to hold a Doctorate in

Psychology and a respected member of the Psychologists for Social Responsibility. <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective> (DOJ Investigative Report 2021)

The DOJ investigative report states, in part, that:

“The lack of community based services drives individuals with serious mental illness into costly psychiatric facilities, but it can also lead to costly incarceration. Alameda County spent \$177.2 million in fiscal year 2016-2017 on Santa Rita Jail, not including mental health services, with around 25% of its population having serious mental illness.”

In the words of the iconic comedian and actor, Chris Tucker, I respectfully ask you “Can you understand the words that are coming out of my mount??!”

These people – and I’m talking about Alameda County Board of Supervisors – had the audacity to approve the allocation of \$24 82 million dollars to hire more sheriff deputies rather than listen to the opinions of experts and provide funding for community-based services that would steer our sisters and brothers away from jail.

But I don’t think y’all hear me. So allow me to share a quote from community leaders, clergy, and people of faith who OBJECTED to the Babu settlement.

Faith in Action East Bay and the Interfaith Coalition for Justice in our Jails (“ICJJ”) has a mantra that supposedly was embraced by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, “**Care First, Jails Last**” is the rally cry of people of faith in the Bay area. Once again, let us view an excerpt from a declaration filed by community members who OBJECTED to the Babu settlement and Consent Decree.

In their OBJECTIONS (Docket No. 299 - <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective>), Faith in Action East Bay and the ICJJ state – (date filed December 21, 2021):

“Under persistent and vocal prodding by mental health advocates and community groups, including our own , the Alameda County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a ‘Care First, Jail Last’ resolution as official County policy in May 2021. “Care First, Jail Last” prioritizes prevention, rehabilitation, and health-focused programs with the goal of reducing the number of people with behavioral health conditions detained at Santa Rita Jail.”

The people of faith continued to saying:

“The (Babu) Consent decree takes no account of this county policy to dramatically reduce jail occupancy. Rather, it mandates a large and costly increase in jail based treatment and custodial staff based on projected jail occupancy levels even higher than current and recent levels. Furthermore, the current version lacks in those staffing increases – 259 sworn staff, 72 non-sworn sheriff’s staff, and 107 forensic mental health staff – untethered to future jail population levels.”

Sisters and brothers in struggle, can you say “Sweetheart Deal”?

The Alameda County Sheriff’s Office (“ACSO”) was given \$24-82 million dollars with absolutely no benchmarks or periodic reviews to ensure staffing targets and financial commitments were being met. We have truly been hoodwinked.

HEY, TAKE THE MONEY & RUN!

It has been a little over one year since the initial implementation of the Babu Consent Decree. I spoke to my Federal defense attorney about two weeks ago and she informed me that ACSO informed her that they would no longer facilitate legal Zoom visits at SRJ for clients are housed at SRJ. However, with push-

back, the ACSO entered into negotiations and the ASCO made a concession. Going forward, the ACSO will allow legal Zoom visits on an extremely limited basis. The reason given by the ACSO was “not enough staff.” After hearing this, I began singing the song “Hey, take the money and run...” because that is exactly what these oppressors and violators of the “public trust” have done. They have swindled our community taxpayers and sold us an empty “bill of goods.”

If you could see the horrible conditions some of your loved ones are being kept in inside SRJ, you would storm the chambers of the people responsible.

As we near the end of this first piece of a multi-part series, I am compelled to remind you that these so-called “joint experts” chosen by defense and plaintiffs’ counsel are not even from the Bay Area!

Let’s end with a quote from Cat Brooks and Amber Nicole Hilton on behalf of the Anti-Police Terror Project and Mental Health First (See Document Number 387, filed January 3, 2022 - <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective>):

“The Consent Decree does not address the main concern of the complaint which is Alameda County’s systemic reliance on incarceration in place of adequate mental health care. Therefore, rather than a redistribution of resources to Santa Rita and Alameda County Sheriff’s Office, we need a robust restructuring of mental health services in the county. Specifically, more funding toward diversion, prevention, community & peer based programs. And not further funding Santa Rita or mental health jails like John George. Going forward we must divorce mental health care from incarceration. As a community, we must devise strategies to meet basic human needs such as access to quality food, housing, medical care, and we

must invest in building impactful mental health resources.”

We must make every effort to persevere in the face of resistance and adversity, as Fannie Lou Hamer did in 1964 and in 1965 when she was barred from the ballot after she announced her candidacy for the Mississippi House of Representatives and a year later one of three first Black women to stand in the U.S. Congress when they unsuccessfully protested the Mississippi 1964 election.

FANNIE LOU HAMER – 1917 to 1977



For those of you who are interested, I was inspired to write this piece after reading an article which appeared on Yahoo News on Friday, February 24, 2023. The article was entitled, “SRJ Deaths Gain National Attention, Calls for Independent Federal Investigation.” I became excited and anxious. My pulse rate quickened – “Are we finally gaining some traction with the mainstream media?” I thought. However, as I read the article, I quickly discovered that this “SRJ” was located in Beckley, West Virginia. The name of this lock-up is Southern Regional Jail and in 2022, 13 people died there. (SRJ Deaths Gain National Attention - <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective>)

This article recounted the stories of Quantez Burks (died March 1, 2022) and Alvis Shrewsbury (died September 17, 2022). Their family members have faced racism, bigotry, and a deep seeded good ‘ol boy culture in West Virginia which hold no value in the loss of Black lives.

The good news is that Reverend William J. Barber II and the Poor People’s Campaign is on the scene demanding justice in the heart of a KKK strong hold.

The President of Destination Freedom, Gale Sanders, and I decided to post a solidarity message in the spirit of “An injury to one, is an injury to all.” I learned that slogan years ago when I joined IWOC and the IWW, but that’s another story.

I humbly request all of you take time to read our articles posted on our website: <https://destination-freedom.org/srj-freedom-collective>

Share our stories and artwork; discuss the topics; let’s forgive one another and focus more energy on healing our community. I’ve made the first step; NOW, it’s up to you!

Please amplify our voice and our struggle.

WE ARE THE SANTA RITA JAIL FREEDOM COLLECTIVE!