

FIGHTING THE “BEAST” KNOWN AS ARAMARK
Part 1: The “Top Secret” Religious Menu

Author: Santa Rita Jail Freedom Collective

“Part of the reason that food and medical care are so bad in Santa Rita Jail is because food service provider, ARAMARK, and medical provider, WELLPATH, are both a for-profit companies. They are paid by the day, so if they don’t spend money on you, they get to keep the money.

“The commissary is also expensive because the Sheriff gets 40 cents of every dollar that he/she charges you. This is an incentive for him/her to make the County food bad and commissary expensive.”

Yolanda Huang, Attorney
February 15, 2022 (excerpt from a letter
sent to prisoners inside Santa Rita Jail)

Greetings Free World allies and friends. We, the incarcerated members of the Santa Rita Jail Freedom Collective (“SRJFC”) take issue with the manner in which the Alameda County Board of Supervisors has ignored our mistreatment and exploitation. We are not operating under any delusions. We have heard the cries for oversight from the community. Recently, we watched a Sheriff’s deputy, who was being paid by the taxpayers of Alameda County, enter the home of respected members of our community and murder them with his service revolver.

NO OVERSIGHT OF SANTA RITA JAIL
IS A VIOLATION OF THE PUBLIC’S TRUST!
Shame on you, Nate Miley! SHAME!!

Today, we are here to inform the community and citizens of conscience about the deceptive business practices and conspirational relationship between Aramark Corporation and the County of Alameda Sheriff’s Office.

Some of you reading this article may have loved ones or friends housed at Santa Rita Jail (“SRJ”) located in Dublin, California.

Aramark is the food service provider at SRJ and there are some things that we believe you need to know.

Approximately 3 years ago, a local civil rights attorney in the Bay Area by the name of Yolanda Huang filed a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of prisoners at SRJ which addresses horrible food served by Aramark, sub-standard healthcare, which is provided by Wellpath, as well as conditions of confinement at the infamous Alameda County lockup. See:

Gonzalez, et al. v. Ahern, et al.
Case No. 3:19-cv-07423-JSC (N.D. Cal.)

Aramark Corporation has aggressively attempted to obstruct and stall the litigation process while continuing to deprive prisoners housed at SRJ of adequate nutrition and proper calories.

The "TOP SECRET" Menu

The "Beast," known as Aramark, fears the illumination of their deceptive business practices so they have employed a tactic whereby they conceal the actual menus for all meals served to prisoners housed at SRJ.

Free world allies with the organization, Impact/Justice, came out with a detailed report in November 2020 which focused on the quality of food served to prisoners in jails and prisons throughout the United States. Part 2 of the Impact/Justice report is entitled: "When Food Harms," and describes the short term and long term effects of being deprived adequate nutrition.

Aramark knows that by obstructing prisoner access to food menus, it will protect the prison profiteers from being held accountable. Without the menus, prisoners at SRJ have no possible way of knowing what items are missing in their daily meals.

What is remarkable here is that not even the Sheriff's deputies at the jail have access to Aramark menus, yet the grievance unit directs prisoners to alert deputies of any alleged shortages in their meals.

We have found that there are some deputies at SRJ that object to the food provider making them the scapegoat in this game.

SRJ prisoner, David Misch, receives the Kosher/Halal diet at the jail and has been on the religious diet for approximately 4 years. Mr. Misch reports going hungry many nights because Aramark has failed to provide the required portions by volume and weight.

Mr. Misch has filed numerous grievances which cite the discrepancies, but he could not actually prove his case until he saw an actual Aramark menu.

In the early part of the year 2019, Mr. Misch noticed the “disappearance” of fruit portions and dessert from all religious meals. He eventually was directed to the nutritionist at SRJ. The nutritionist worked for the medical department and had access to the illusive Aramark menu. The nutritionist told Mr. Misch that Aramark had him sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement regarding Aramark’s menu. He allowed Mr. Misch to look at the menu but by no means could he provide Mr. Misch a copy.

The million-dollar question was “what was the big secret?” Aramark erroneously claims that their jailhouse food menus contain “trade secrets.” Aramark uses the dubious quasi-designation to block prisoner access or anyone else that begins to question the actual content of meals served at SRJ.

It didn't take long before attorney Yolanda Huang, attorney Kellie Walters, as well as volunteers from the National Lawyers Guild in San Francisco began digging for answers.

Attorney Huang decided it was time to file a public information act request. Since Mr. Misch was receiving the Kosher/Halal religious diet, she requested a copy of the Alameda County Religious Meals Menu created by Aramark.

Attorney Huang and other interested parties noticed that the menu was marked “confidential.” However, the only “secret” revealed was the exact item, amount, and portion size by volume and weight a prisoner should be receiving in their daily religious diet.

It is noteworthy to mention that the *Gonzalez* lawsuit is not exclusively about religious meals served at SRJ. *Gonzalez* is about all meals served at SRJ and David Misch is not the only prisoner being forced to go hungry. Mr. Misch is just one of those rare individuals who've decided to fight back against the "Beast."

Attorney Huang and some very dedicated volunteers from the National Lawyers Guild decided to press the issue further. Mr. Misch had engaged in a lengthy hunger strike in the early part of 2022 where he actually saved every meal Aramark had sent. These religious meals were sealed with plastic.

In early March 2022, Attorney Huang received a court order from the judge presiding over the *Gonzalez* case.

On March 1, 2022, Attorney Huang arrived at SRJ with a small group of volunteers and they were on a mission. The small band of concerned citizens brought video and audio recording devices as well as scales and measuring devices that could record exact volume and weight of food items prepared by Aramark.

Both Aramark and Alameda County Sheriff's Office sent lawyers and legal advisors to observe the event. Attorney Huang and the volunteers collected 7-1/2 hours of video which clearly showed a pattern of conduct. Aramark, the food provider at SRJ, was providing meals that were grossly deficient and lacking the proper portions and/or items. Aramark is systematically harming us by starving us!!

If we sound angry...WE ARE! You should be, too, because it is the taxpayers of Alameda County that are being hoodwinked and bamboozled.

The evidence clearly shows that there has been a breach of contract by Aramark and the Alameda County Sheriff's Office helped cover it up.

In essence, these shortages of food have a direct impact on the daily nutritional and calorie values needed to sustain healthy adult human beings – thus producing both physiological and psychological illnesses.

Aramark and the Alameda County Sheriff's Office seem to enjoy exploiting and mistreating poor people and people of color. We have seen Alameda County assemble para-military shock troops when evicting mothers with children a couple years ago on Magnolia Street in Oakland, California. Recently, we saw poor folks were evicted from the homeless encampment on Wood Street.

Some homeless people and advocates showed up at Frank Ogawa Plaza with signs asking "Where will we go?" The sad truth is that some of our houseless sisters and brothers will be forced into the confines of SRJ.

If we prisoners can draw these conclusions, how come the "powers that be" in Oakland are playing dumb? Is incarceration their "final solution"?

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

In closing, we request that our friends on the outside make absolutely sure that the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, as well as members of the media and activist community see this article.

We also request that community members rally behind Attorney Huang and support her work (email: yhuang.law@gmail.com).

We need fiscal auditors as well as Federal monitors to come inside SRJ in order to ensure that Aramark and the Alameda County Sheriff's Office are providing us with proper nutrition and calories.

It would also be powerful if community members DEMAND that the Alameda County Board of Supervisors award the food contract at SRJ to a company other than Aramark.

This is only Part 1 of a multi-part series. Our intent is to educate and inform the people. We would like to send a shout out to all the activists and freedom fighters who passionately advocate for people like us.

Please amplify our voices.

In Solidarity
Santa Rita Jail Freedom Collective

SRJFC dedicates this article to honor the memory of MAURICE MONK. Maurice was a prisoner at SRJ who died because Sheriff's deputies and medical staff ignored his pleas for help! Maurice desperately needed his hypertension medication. Their blatant deliberate indifference and neglect led to his untimely death in November 2021.



We want the world to know that MAURICE'S LIFE MATTERED!

Although we are prisoners here at SRJ, we are still human beings. Please support lawyers like Adante Pointer and Yolanda Huang. They continue to represent the people in our community who have been thrown away and forgotten about.

WE HAVE VALUE AND WORTH!