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March 13, 2020

To: Santa Clara County Sheriff and Board of Supervisors

From: Silicon Valley De-Bug

Re: Immediate Release of Those in Custody & Moratorium on Pretrial Detention

As a community concerned with the health and well-being of those held under the control and responsibility of Santa Clara County, we call on county administrators to release people being detained in our jails and juvenile hall. The COVID-19 (coronavirus) has continued to spread at an exceedingly troubling rate across the country, and [Santa Clara County in particular has one of the highest contamination rates in the nation.](#) At the time of the drafting of this letter, there has been over 70 confirmed cases, and it has taken the lives of four people in Santa Clara already. The unfortunate reality is these numbers are increasing daily.

As such, city and county officials and public health experts have shut down gatherings, schools, issued warnings of congregating in sizable numbers, and have instructed residents about the need for social distancing.

The county jails are institutional opposites of what the public is told to do so slowdown the spread — and is essentially a combustible crisis waiting to happen. Medical experts say that [it is not a question of if, but when, the virus will enter jails and prisons.](#)

While the risks of keeping people in a closed-off shared space as a jail is a problem on its own, the issue becomes even more dangerous given the repeated history of [medical and hygienic problems that have been raised of the past several years at the jail.](#) Add to the fact that many people incarcerated have compromised medical conditions or compromised immune systems due to prolonged incarceration, and are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 — we have an urgent crisis at downtown jail and the Elmwood facilities that needs solving before it is too late.

That is why we are calling on the release of those currently incarcerated and a moratorium on pretrial detention and county jail sentences for those with new charges. This approach would be a prudent step the county can take to reduce the likelihood of an outbreak of the coronavirus.

The other place where system actors can take an affirmative step to reduce the spread of the coronavirus is the courts itself. We call on a moratorium on charges, such as technical violations of probation, that unnecessarily bring people to gather at court.

While release plans are being created, we call on the county to publicly share an articulable plan regarding health and safety procedures being implemented for those in custody. Lockdowns, or stopping visits, are not an acceptable, nor purposeful, response. Keeping detainees in prolonged isolation or lockdown will increase the likelihood of mental health difficulties, a problem that already overwhelms the jails.

Your actions can literally save thousands of lives in Santa Clara County.