

Contra Costa Budget Justice Coalition

June 9, 2020

Supervisor Candace Anderson
Supervisor Diane Burgis
Supervisor John Gioia
Supervisor Federal Glover
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff
County Administrator David Twa
Health Services Director Anna Roth
Employment and Human Services Director Kathy Gallagher

Dear Supervisors, Administrator Twa, and Directors Roth and Gallagher:

The extraordinary times we live in call on all of us to rise to the occasion, gather our communities, and initiate, join and lead efforts to address the urgent needs of Contra Costa residents. These needs include in particular the glaring issues of racism, economic inequality, police violence, and the disproportionate health and economic impacts of Covid-19 on low-income residents and communities of color in our county.

The Contra Costa Budget Justice Coalition (BJC) believes this deep and complex web of crises and conditions presents unique opportunities to take concrete actions to address systemic issues that affect the health and well-being of all people who live in Contra Costa.

We are writing to focus your attention on the following aspects of the current situation, along with specific requests and recommendation in each area:

1. Incorporate racial justice and equity issues more deeply into the County's COVID-19 response by ensuring that members of the most impacted sectors of our community are engaged in programming and decision-making.
2. Create meaningful and inclusive community engagement opportunities in the county's FY 20-21 budget development process.
3. Explore county actions to reform policing practices which align with anti-racism principles recently announced by Governor Newsom.
4. Eliminate the use of our public monies on programs which provide military equipment to law enforcement, even if such equipment is provided at 'no cost'.
5. Explore ways to redirect funding into community health, education, employment and housing programs.

COVID-19 and Racial Justice

The death and economic devastation brought on by the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affect low-income people and communities of color, specifically members of the Black and Latinx communities. The prospects of an ongoing health crisis, compounded by what is shaping up to be the worst recession since the Great Depression, means that these harms to our community will persist beyond the shelter-

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in-place period. This will undoubtedly leave those who were already in economically and socially-depressed situations, even more so.

While challenging, this moment in time also presents an opportunity to critically examine our systems, understand how and why the most vulnerable residents bear the biggest burdens, and to take steps to redress systemic inequities.

We call on the Board to engage with the Racial Justice Coalition in forming a Racial Justice Task Force to pull together community leaders from communities of color, in particular those from the Black community, who are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19, with County leaders and other stakeholders, to address racial justice issues in our response to the COVID-19 crisis. The City of San Jose recently formed such a [Task Force](#) that may serve as a model. This new task force would complement the work of the Board of Supervisor's current COVID-19 Ad Hoc Committee that is addressing re-opening issues. We also recognize that the Social Needs Task Force of the Health Services Department and a number of community-based organizations and coalitions are also addressing some of these issues, and would recommend that these efforts be cross-informed.

Community Engagement in Budget Process

Fundamental to our democracy as a government “of the people, by the people and for the people” is the right of the people to have opportunities for meaningful engagement and input on budget priorities and decisions. Contra Costa County’s mission is to provide “public services which improve the quality of life of our residents and the economic viability of our businesses.” The quality of life of our residents is currently under great duress, and county budgets reflect a community’s values and priorities. It is imperative that Contra Costa residents have a meaningful voice in the formation of the upcoming county budget.

We recognize that the severe fiscal challenges brought on by the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent economic downturn has increased service demands even as revenue sources begin to shrink, which will likely lead to difficult budget decisions. We understand that shelter-in-place requirements presents unique challenges in facilitating community engagement.

At this moment in time, we believe it is more important than ever that the Board, County Administrator and key Department Directors provide ongoing opportunities for meaningful community engagement as you develop budget plans for coming fiscal year.

We just heard from Mr. Twa that the Budget Justice Coalition’s previously scheduled equity presentation is now scheduled for June 23 – thanks very much for rescheduling. Our presentation will be updated to reflect the economic and community impacts of COVID-19 and the shelter-in-place order. Following our formal presentation on June 23, we request that the Board schedule significant time for the ensuing discussion and community input.

In addition, we request that the following two additional engagement opportunities take place **prior** to the upcoming Board budget hearing, which we understand may happen in August.

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1. Reschedule the Health Services and EHSD Town Hall. We had scheduled this year's health and social services budget town hall with Anna Roth and Kathy Gallagher for late February, but it was canceled due to the emerging public health crisis. We would like to reschedule and (virtually) hold this event as soon as possible, will follow up with Directors Roth and Gallagher, and ask for your support in arranging this.
2. Resume meetings of the Board's Family and Human Services Committee immediately. The FHS Committee provides an important forum for departmental transparency and for stakeholder and community input on critical social service and safety net needs.

As you may know, numerous organizations and individuals in Contra Costa are working hard every day to meet the growing health and social service needs of our community's residents during this difficult time. Budget Justice Coalition members are involved in many of these efforts, such as:

- A group of East Bay Foundations sponsored a **Sanford Institute survey** of nonprofits in Alameda and Contra Costa; summary of findings is available [here](#).
- **First Five Contra Costa** is conducting a survey on the needs of local children and families.
- The **Human Services Alliance** is conducting a survey of service providers in Contra Costa to learn more about the challenges, innovations, and needs of the service sector in the current environment.
- **Multi-Faith Action Coalition** is gathering stories and data about local tenants' ability to pay rent, health and economic impacts on essential workers, and other factors affecting the economic well-being of Contra Costa residents.

We appreciate the County's own data gathering efforts, such as through the Health Department's Social Needs Task Force and the Marginalized Communities Task Force. We plan to incorporate key data from these new efforts into our June 23 presentation, with the goal of providing useful policy and budget insights and recommendations.

Criminal Justice and Policing Practices

One consequence of the murder of George Floyd has been a dramatically enhanced awareness nationwide of the depths of racism in our society, and the need to reform police practices. We are beginning to see real movement on these issues in state and local governments.

There are many resources and recommendations on specific steps local governments can take to address deeply engrained, racist patterns, cultures and practices that oppress and harm people of color in our country. We urge the County to actively explore and develop specific policies and budgetary practices to reduce the negative impacts on community members of county law enforcement as well as other County departments. For example:

- The **Obama Foundation** has numerous resources and guidance on steps local governments can take on its [Anguish and Action](#) page. For example, [My Brother's Keeper Alliance](#) asks local leaders to commit to the following actions:
 - REVIEW police use of force policies, and update data on disproportionate minority contact.

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- ENGAGE local communities by including a diverse range of input, experiences, and stories in your review.
- REPORT review findings to the community and seek feedback.
- REFORM police use of force policies
- **Campaign Zero's #8CANTWAIT project** lays out eight specific policing policies that have been demonstrated to reduce police violence by 72%.
- **Research and implement transformative policies** such as transparency in police practices, bail reform, and prosecutorial accountability.

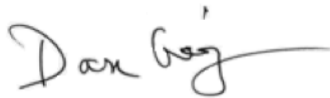
We look forward to working with the Board and County leaders on these important issues, and close with these final thoughts:

The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We . . . will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.

- Abraham Lincoln's Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862

Thank you for your attention to our requests. We look forward to your response soon.



Dan Geiger
Coordinator
Budget Justice Coalition

On behalf of the Steering Committee:

- Fran Biderman, First Five Contra Costa, Family Economic Security Partnership (FESP), Budget Justice Coalition Steering Committee
- Stacie Hinton, AFSCME Local 2700, Budget Justice Coalition Steering Committee
- Cheryl Sudduth, West County Wastewater, (Vice-President, Board of Directors), Contra Costa Racial Justice Oversight Body (RJOB), Contra Costa Racial Justice Coalition (CCRJC-Steering Committee), Contra Costa Immigration Rights Alliance (CCIRA), ACLU (Board), BWOPA (Lifetime Member, Political Action Advisory Board), Budget Justice Coalition Steering Committee, NAACP
- Mariana Moore, Ensuring Opportunity Campaign, Budget Justice Coalition Project Manager

And Budget Justice Coalition Organizational Members

AFSCME Local 2700

Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Choice in Aging

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Community Clinic Consortium of Contra Costa & Solano
Contra Costa Labor Council
Contra Costa Office of Education
Contra Costa Racial Justice Coalition
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy
Ensuring Opportunity Campaign
First 5 Contra Costa/Family Economic Security Partnership (FESP)
Greater Richmond Interfaith Program
Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Human Services Alliance of Contra Costa
IFPTE Local 21
League of Women Voters Diablo Valley
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Meals on Wheels Senior Outreach
Multi-Faith Action Coalition
Planned Parenthood of Northern California
Richmond Community Foundation
Rubicon Programs
Safe Return
SEIU Local 1021
And many residents of Contra Costa