



ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**Press Conference and Rally for the
People's Budget Fix:**

*Criminal Justice Reforms that will Increase Public Safety, Protect the Social Safety Net
& Save the State Billions*

Sept. 30th, 2009, 11am

Elihu Harris State Building

First of all, many thanks to Zachary Norris, for inviting me to speak at this important rally. I feel quite honored to be here. My name is Michael Shaw and I am the Director of the Urban Male Health Initiative and I am here representing The Alameda County Public Health Department and would like to make a statement.

Our Department is committed to fighting against the injustices that are causing people in Oakland's flatlands to die more than a decade before those living in the Oakland Hills. These injustices cut across many different sectors – housing, employment, transportation to name a few. But in no area is injustice more apparent than in the Criminal Justice System. I am talking about sentencing policies that punish people – primarily men of color – for addiction rather than offer proven treatment opportunities. I am talking about policies that send people away for life for nonviolent offenses and release others back to under-resourced communities with high unemployment rates. I'm talking about a system

full of “invisible punishments” where many formerly incarcerated people lose basic human rights—the right to vote and to access the social supports the rest of us enjoy.

In the words of President Obama’s Chief of Staff – A crisis is a terrible thing to waste. California’s budget crisis presents us with an opportunity to both fix an unjust system and close the gap in life expectancy.

- The system of Incarceration is making our community sick.
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- When someone is incarcerated, there is a deep intergenerational health impact. Families are torn apart, single parents are left behind and entire communities suffer. Not only are children of the incarcerated more likely to end up in foster care but they are five times as likely to end up in prison.
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- While incarcerated, a person is exposed to a multitude of infectious diseases. Rates of HIV, Hepatitis C and Tuberculosis are significantly higher among the incarcerated than in the general population. In fact, rates of HIV are 8-10 times higher.
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- When returning from incarceration, they are denied the basic social supports they need to successfully reintegrate and to survive, like food and housing or loans to pursue their education. Not only that, but with a felony on their record, it is difficult to get a job. We know that people without jobs and without housing have poorer health outcomes and die younger.
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- We also know that punishments are not metted out equally. For instance, we know that Whites and African Americans use and sell drugs at similar rates; but the arrest and incarceration of African Americans for drug offenses happen at dramatically higher rates. Obviously race and racism are at play. So in addition to all the health risks an incarcerated person is exposed to the racism that is ingrained in the system negatively affects people’s health because racism leads to stress and stress leads to various health problems, like heart disease and high blood pressure.
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- Individuals, families, communities are suffering as a result of our criminal justice system not improving. WE NEED TO TAKE THIS BUDGET CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REDUCE INJUSTICE AND INEQUITY IN BOTH HEALTH OUTCOMES AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM