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**JAIL SHOWS PUBLIC DEFENDER VIDEO INSTRUCTING
INCARCERATED PEOPLE HOW THEY CAN VOTE IN UPCOMING ELECTION**

ALAMEDA COUNTY, Calif. – Santa Rita County Jail last week began showing two public service announcements produced by the Public Defender’s Office encouraging people held there to vote in the November 3rd election.

Many people wrongly believe they cannot vote if they are in jail or have been convicted of a felony. In fact, only people who are currently on parole, are serving a state prison sentence or are mentally incompetent cannot vote.

“There’s a pervasive belief that people who have been prosecuted by the criminal justice system shouldn’t have their voices heard. We want to change that,” said Alameda County Chief Public Defender Brendon Woods. “There are nearly 2,000 people in our county jail. Many of them can vote, and every eligible citizen should cast a ballot in the upcoming election.”

The videos were produced by the Public Defender’s V.O.I.C.E. project (Voting Outreach Increases Community Empowerment). Since 2016, social workers, attorneys and other public defender employees have helped over 1,100 incarcerated people to vote. The program has visited Santa Rita 12 times and also registered people at an event outside the jail and at the Public Defender’s annual community party.

The videos describe who is eligible to vote and provide instructions for how to vote from jail. Tuesday, September 22 is National Voter Registration Day. Because of the increase in vote-by-mail ballots, people should make sure they’re registered and should get their ballots in the mail as soon as possible.

There are two versions of the video. One, in English, features Chief Defender Brendon Woods, Ear Hustle co-host and producer Earlonne Woods and Adnan Khan, executive director of Re:Store Justice. There’s also a Spanish version featuring Associate Deputy Public Defender Daniela Molina. The videos were produced by Manuel Ortiz, a social worker at the office. Ear Hustle co-founder Antwan Williams produced the music featured in the videos.

The jail’s inmate services division this week began showing the videos on TVs at the jail and has also put a “Step-by-Step Voter Registration Guide” created by the Public Defender’s Office on electronic tablets used by people at the jail to communicate with their loved ones. The V.O.I.C.E. team also has hosted two days where it was on call for people at the jail to call in with questions and hopes to have more on-call events before the election.

The project is part of the public defender’s larger efforts to uplift the voices of people who are too

often neglected by mainstream society. Along with the V.O.I.C.E. program, the Public Defender's Office last year successfully advocated for legislation to allow people convicted of felonies to serve on juries.

“Black and Brown people are disproportionately affected by over-policing and prosecution. Their voices need to be heard, and the two most direct ways of ensuring that are voting and sitting as a juror,” said Woods, who is the first Black chief defender in Alameda County and the only Black chief in California.

The videos are available on YouTube and can also be downloaded and shared with people held in other jails in California. To download the English version, visit <https://tinyurl.com/y6y9pgzt>. To download the Spanish version, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yxtph6m5>.

The English version on YouTube can be found here: <https://youtu.be/09iYpxpAAow>. The Spanish version on YouTube is here: <https://youtu.be/O0DRdVP-HbY>.

Jails are not the same as prisons. Prisons are run by the state of California or the federal government and hold people who have been convicted of certain felonies. Jails, on the other hand, hold people in the following situations: 1) people who are accused of committing new crimes or otherwise violating the terms of court-ordered supervision, 2) people who have been sentenced to time in jail after misdemeanor or certain felony convictions, 3) people who have been sentenced to state prison and awaiting transportation there and 4) people held by other entities that rent space from the jail, such as the federal government.

Who can vote in California: Cheat Sheet

- 1) Must be a citizen of the United States.
- 2) Must be at least 18 years old.
- 3) Can vote if on probation or Post Release Community Supervision.
- 4) Can vote if have felony conviction on record.
- 5) Cannot be currently on parole.
- 6) Cannot be currently serving a state or federal prison sentence.
- 7) Cannot be currently deemed mentally incompetent by the court.

A note on language: The preferred term for someone locked in jail or prison is “incarcerated person.” Please try not to use “inmate” or “suspect.”