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Subject: Yolo County Jail Visitation

I was delighted by one part of today's Davis Enterprise report, ¹ which says says the jail has stopped requiring would-be visitors to phone between midnight and 7AM to schedule a visit. "Rather than enabling and encouraging visits, current practice discourages them," says the six-page grand jury report released Friday, noting that studies show jail visits help reduce recidivism by establishing continued social support from the community".

But my delight died when I saw "The grand jury report further recommends that the Yolo County Board of Supervisors allocate funding for online scheduling and video visitation systems at the jail by Dec. 31, 2020". [Emphasis mine.]

I hope the Grand Jury urged the Yolo County Board of Supervisors not to replace in-person visits entirely with video. Frustrating as it is to visit through a thick plexiglass window and try to converse through the static of a worn-out telephone handset, for many inmates and their families it's critically important to see one another face-to-face, not through expensive video hardware with grainy images and poor reception.

When we were both on the Yolo County Local Mental Health Board, Bob Canning, then CDCR's suicide prevention chief, and I learned about and protested the Yolo County Jail plan to end face-to-face visits and offer only video visitation. We protested that plan in a meeting we and other LMHB members had with jail senior staff and the remodel architect three years ago. There has been plenty of time for the Sheriff's department to heed that protest and change that plan, and I'm sorry to see the Grand Jury support it.

I'm sure you understand the added challenge the "video only" plan is for people who have difficulty telling reality from hallucinated voices. The time delay and expense involved in getting access to the video service is another cruel blow to inmates and their families, particularly when family support is a key to mental stability.

By May 2016, at least five California counties (Kings, Napa, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Solano) had eliminated in-person visitation in at least one of their jails, meaning families there can only see their loved ones through a computer screen. Nationwide, the trend is alarming: 74% of correctional facilities that have implemented video visitation have also eliminated in-person visitation, and additional county correctional facilities in California are moving forward with plans to replace in-person visitation with video visitation.

Families with members in these institutions must pay for expensive video "visits" from home -up to \$1 per minute- or they can video "visit" their incarcerated family member from the jail lobby for free. For many people, the technology is difficult to navigate. The picture is often grainy and the transmission is subject to lags. Visual acuity is lost. **Today, the ACLU exposed the outrages video visit companies like Securus commit and their sad effect on inmates and inmates' families.**²

By the 2015-16 legislative year, many Californians were protesting video-visits-only policies. We were already outraged by video-visit companies like Securo, and we knew that under Realignment, local jails would house people convicted of low-level felonies for lengthy sentences. Thus the importance of maintaining family connections during the period of incarceration cannot be minimized. Providing access to visiting improves behavior inside institutions, reduces recidivism, and reduces negative impacts on loved ones.

The California state Senate and Assembly both [voted through](#) a bill, SB 1157, that would have given incarcerated people guaranteed weekly in-person visits. It would have kept counties from replacing in-person visits entirely with video. Governor Brown vetoed the bill, though even he expressed reservations about video visits replacing in-person visits in his [veto statement](#)³.

Please do your best to see to it that Yolo County continues to allow in-person visits and, more than that, that we encourage and facilitate them to the greatest extent possible.

June

1. <https://www.davisenterprise.com/local-news/grand-jury-probe-leads-to-visit-scheduling-changes-at-yolo-jail/>
2. <https://www.aclu.org/blog/privacy-technology/location-tracking/company-handles-prison-phone-calls-surveilling-people-who>
3. <http://www.businessinsider.com/california-governor-killed-bill-that-guarantes-in-person-visit-right-2016-9>