Community Groups Oppose ACRJ Jail Renovation

The People's Coalition Jail Committee, Legal Aid Justice Center, and a wide range of community groups focusing on education, housing, and reentry oppose the large-scale renovation of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail. The initial estimated cost by Moseley Architects is a staggering **$49 million**. In 27 years, when the bond is paid in full, the cost to our communities would balloon to **over $72 million**. This unsound use of taxpayer dollars puts future generations in debt. Punitive carceral systems like a new jail only serve to perpetuate the mass incarceration of Black and brown people and fail to keep us all safe.

We demand that our taxpayer dollars be invested in resources that create safety and prevent imprisonment and recidivism. This means investments in affordable housing, diversion programs, reentry programs, mental health services, and youth recreation programs. Marcus Alert, which continues to be unfunded, and Partner for Mental Health are worthwhile programs to invest in because they work to prevent the caging of people who need mental health treatment. We should also increase funding for the Restorative Justice Program, which has the support of the Commonwealth attorneys. In addition, we should be resourcing reentry programs that support our community members in successful reintegration. For instance, 94% of the Fountain Fund's client partners that received microloans avoid reincarceration.

The process for this renovation has been riddled with transparency issues that erode community trust. For instance, Superintendent Kumer made fundamental changes to the project timeline without any notice. He sent out the request for proposals for architectural and engineering services *before* seeking interim funding. The initial plan included a second floor, and now we are hearing that there are plans for a third floor. There is a lack of clarity about the purpose and capacity of additional space.

Additionally, the proposed jail renovation project has a dearth of community input, particularly from directly impacted people and their families. Poorly attended community engagement sessions held virtually during a global pandemic are not meaningful engagement with the community. The limited input received from a handful of community members included no discussion of cost or a total budget.

The People's Coalition Jail Committee calls for the interim funding not to be approved at this time. We call on lawmakers in Charlottesville, Albermarle, and Nelson to create a work group comprised of stakeholders and directly impacted community members. The workgroup should be tasked with community engagement and developing a tiered option of proposals. Interim funding must be conditioned on the architecture and engineering firms providing different tiers of renovation concepts with an itemized breakdown of costs. This is essential to ensure that community members have options to consider. This all-or-nothing approach to renovations is misleading to the community and exorbitantly costly. Jails do not fix the social problems affecting our community members, but resourcing affordable housing, reentry programs, and mental health programs does.

Care not cages is the way forward.

Signed,
Abundant Life
Asian Student Union, UVA
City of Promise
Charlottesville DSA
Charlottesville Public Housing Association of Residents
Congregate Cville
Dissenters at UVA
DivestUVA
Equal Justice USA Evangelical Network
Freedom for Felons
Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County
Lending Hands
Minority Rights Coalition at UVA
Outsider Advocacy
Piedmont Housing Alliance
Prolyfyck Run Crew
Undergraduate Women in Law at UVA
UndocUVA
Queer Student Union, UVA
Second Chancer Foundation
Legal Aid Justice Center
People's Coalition Jail Committee