

**Date:** 10 July 2023

**To:** Community Corrections Partnership Community Advisory Board

**From:** Rachel Rosekind

**Re:** Agenda Item 4: CAB Priorities for AB 109 Excess Funds

Dear CAB members:

My name is Rachel Rosekind. I work with and on behalf of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals in the areas of pre-release support, reference by mail, direct resourcing, arts mentorship, and literacy enrichment. In recent years, I've been heartened to see more public attention, municipal resources, and private funding directed to uplifting the voices and addressing the needs of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. Many of these newer initiatives and programs have been planned, launched, overseen, and/or evaluated by people with lived experience of incarceration, including two of the ones I want to highlight in this comment. There is a shift in attention and intention, and we should seize the moment to amplify resources and optimize opportunities for Contra Costa's returning community members.

One organization, the Center for Employment Opportunities, conceived and implemented the Returning Citizens Stimulus program in response to Covid-19, which distributed \$24M to 10,400 formerly incarcerated individuals. While the Returning Citizens Stimulus was a *conditional* cash transfer program, contingent upon participants meeting reentry milestones and other specifications, guaranteed income (GI) programs are predicated upon unconditional financial support: participants are not required to meet benchmarks or self-report, and their behaviors and spending are neither monitored nor tracked, unless they voluntarily submit to do so. Three notable programs, one in Gainesville, Florida, and the other two in Alameda County, through Community Works West and Rubicon, respectively, are currently running or have completed GI pilots for formerly incarcerated individuals. Gainesville's program, Just Income, provided 115 justice-impacted individuals with \$1,000 for the first month and \$600 a month for the next eleven months. Community Works West's and Rubicon's programs had a longer arc of 18 months of financial support, coupled with additional resources and opportunities. Just Income's pilot will be evaluated by an independent research team to better understand the relationship between income and recidivism, housing security, sense of identity, and the criminalization of poverty. Notably, the program is designed and administered by formerly incarcerated people, who "know from our own experience that poverty can lead to incarceration and incarceration can lead to poverty. We believe a temporary guaranteed income could stop this revolving door. Our goal is to determine if a guaranteed income can mitigate known barriers to successful reentry and unlock the inherent potential of our justice-impacted neighbors."

**Trust**—something which many incarcerated individuals have often learned to live years without giving or receiving—and **dignity**—another casualty of the prison system—are the cornerstones of guaranteed income programs. One of Just Income's recipients said, "I don't know what was scarier—going into prison or coming out." Unconditional cash assistance alleviates a principal source of stress that most returning citizens endure from the moment they learn of their release—how will I earn money to secure the resources I need to live? A GI program that runs for a sufficient and predetermined period of time sits alongside other critical supports that enhance opportunities for successful reentry and reintegration. Cash payments are not a panacea: people still need housing, health care, employment, and other vital resources. But a reliable monthly cash payment gives people the economic freedom to dream, heal, and belong. And don't we all deserve that?

Just income wrapped up its first pilot in February 2023 and is readying for another round. Its recently-released impact report, which shows how funds were spent and other notable measures and outcomes, describes more than what the dollars secured on a material level. It reveals what guaranteed, no-strings-attached financial resourcing can and *did* enable on a holistic and spiritual level— through the program, recipients experienced a sense of hope, forged connections within their communities, and dedicated quality time to their children, among other life-affirming and soul-buoying activities.

Guaranteed Income programs are often privately funded or supported by a hybrid of private and public monies. However, as municipalities are witnessing the overwhelmingly positive impacts of these pilots— across a spectrum of metrics—and looking for ways to leverage tranches like American Rescue Plan Act dollars, in meaningful, equity-based, and racial-justice-informed ways, there is more attention to how government funds can directly alleviate poverty and ameliorate its effects, reduce homelessness and housing insecurity, and otherwise expand social support through innovative and proven programs like guaranteed income. I urge the CAB to learn more about these numerous pilots and to explore how excess AB 109 funds can be used to launch such a pilot in Contra Costa to support our many returning community members so they can feel just a little less scared and a little more supported, and so we, as a community, can pursue avenues that offer hope and opportunity and enhance collective care and community well-being.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warmly,



Rachel Rosekind, PhD, MLIS