

# Prisoner Legal Services

SHERIFF'S OVERSIGHT BOARD PRESENTATION  
December 1, 2023

# Presentation Overview

1. Introduction to the Prisoner Legal Services (PLS) Unit
  - a. History of PLS
  - b. PLS Today
2. PLS Services
  - a. Services to the Incarcerated Population
    - i. Access to Court Services
    - ii. Direct Services
  - b. Services to the SFSO
  - c. Services to the Community
3. Challenges
4. Questions

# INTRODUCTION TO PLS

History of PLS  
PLS Today

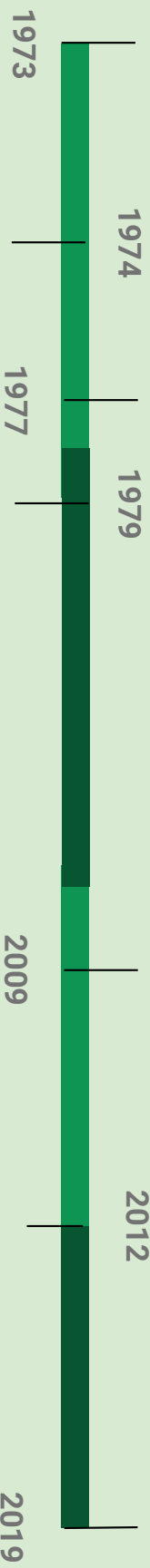
# History of PLS

Sheriff Richard Hongisto  
Hires Raymond Towbis to  
run a rehabilitation  
program. Towbis recruits  
20 students from New  
College's University Year  
for Action program to  
provide services to San  
Francisco's incarcerated  
population. Among them  
is Michael Marcum, an  
ex-offender who would  
go on to be Assistant  
Sheriff.

US Supreme Court  
holds prisoners  
have a right to  
access the courts.

Nick Gregoratos,  
who started at PLS  
as a law student  
intern and  
ex-offender in 1997,  
is hired as Directing  
Attorney.

Sheriff Vikki Hennesy adopts  
first-ever official PLS Policy  
and Procedure formalizing  
role of office within the  
SFSO.



Raymond Towbis hires Vista lawyer  
Michael Hennessey to provide legal  
information and assistance to incarcerated  
population. Hennessey forms "San  
Francisco County Jail Prisoner Legal  
Assistance" and recruits law students to  
help from New College School of Law.

Michael Hennessey wins  
election for Sheriff, secures  
budgeted attorney position  
and funding to establish  
"Prisoner Legal Services."  
Hires Stephen Greenberg as  
first PLS Directing Attorney.

Sheriff Michael  
Hennessey, longest  
serving sheriff in  
California history,  
retires after 32 years of  
service.

# PLS TODAY

Purpose and Mission

Where We Fit in and What Makes Us Different

Who We Are

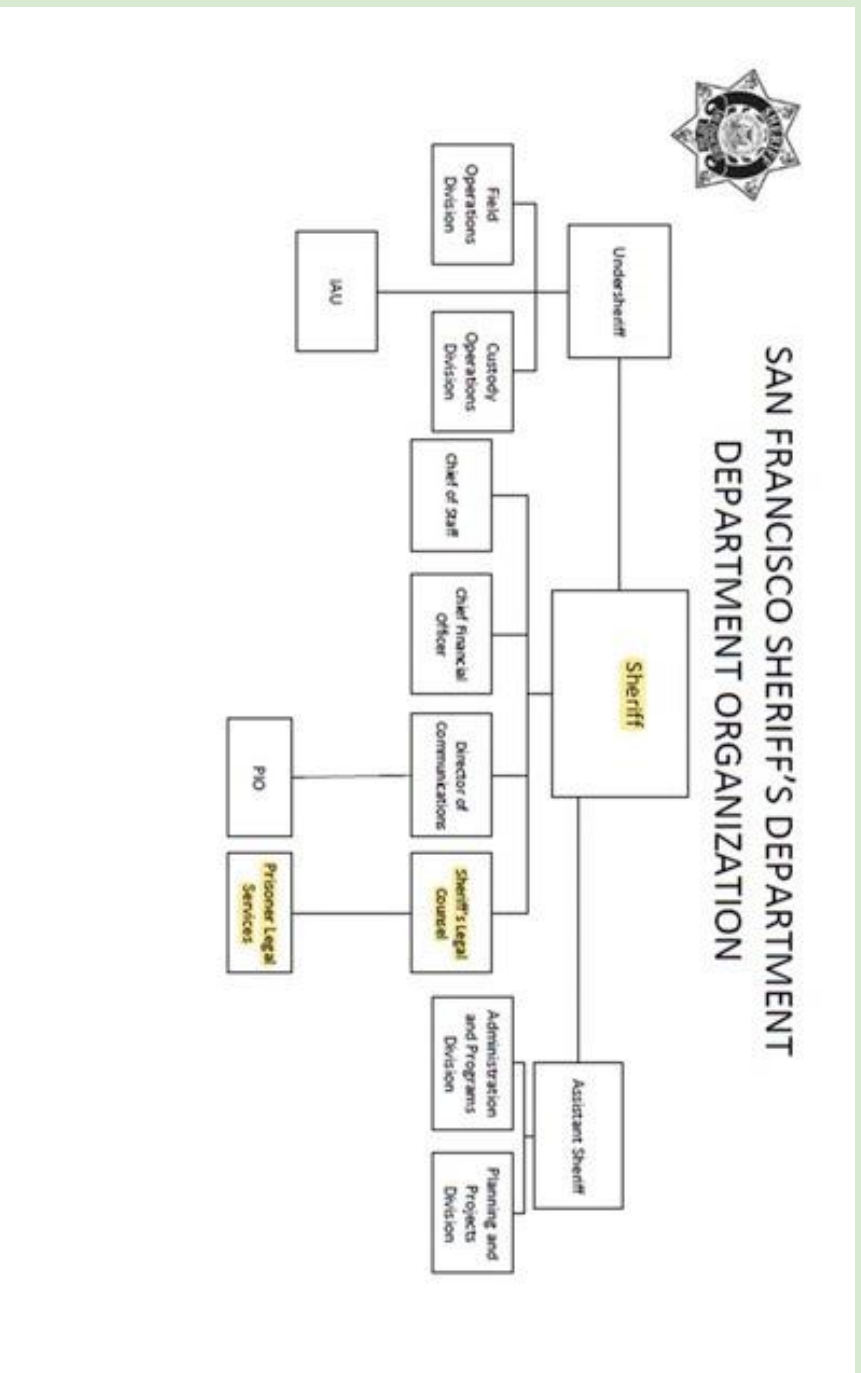
# Purpose and Mission

Our purpose is to assist the SFSO in achieving compliance with law and policy and to assist the incarcerated population with challenges occasioned by their incarceration.

To that end it is our daily mission to:

- A. Ensure every incarcerated person has meaningful access to the courts
  - Provide legal information and materials
  - Provide access to all available administrative/legal remedies
  - Guarantee right to correspond/communicate with court and other officials
- B. Assist incarcerated persons and those recently released from custody in overcoming legal barriers to successful reentry
- C. Facilitate the Sheriff's commitment to the safe and humane housing and treatment of incarcerated persons

# Where We Fit In



# What Makes Us Different?

Barring an articulable safety and security concern, Prisoner Legal Services (PLS) staff..will have **access to all jail facility areas**. PLS staff may meet with incarcerated persons in the housing area, at any time, while conducting PLS business.

Barring Peace Officer Bill of Rights protections and absent an articulable safety and security concern, PLS staff shall have **access to all paper jail records and online court and jail management system records** relevant to PLS business.



# The PLS Team



Nick Gregoratos



Melinda Benson



Asia Harrigan

# PLS Services

Services to the Incarcerated  
Population

- Access to Court Services
- Direct Services

Services to the SFSO

Services to the Community

# Services to the Incarcerated Population

# ***Ensure a meaningful right to access the courts...***

## **Ensure Access to all Available Means of Redress**

- Administrative** - Route and Process Grievances, DPA Complaints, Claims Against City and County of SF, etc.
- Legal** - Provide forms and materials to facilitate filing of legal complaints, petitions, and subsequent pleadings seeking redress for conditions of confinement

## **Provide Information on the Law and Process**

- Conduct Legal Research
- Legal Materials/Forms
- Law Libraries (staff permitting)

## **Facilitate Right to Correspond with Legal Representatives, Government/Other Officials**

## **Pro Per Support**

Service Focus:  
Information!



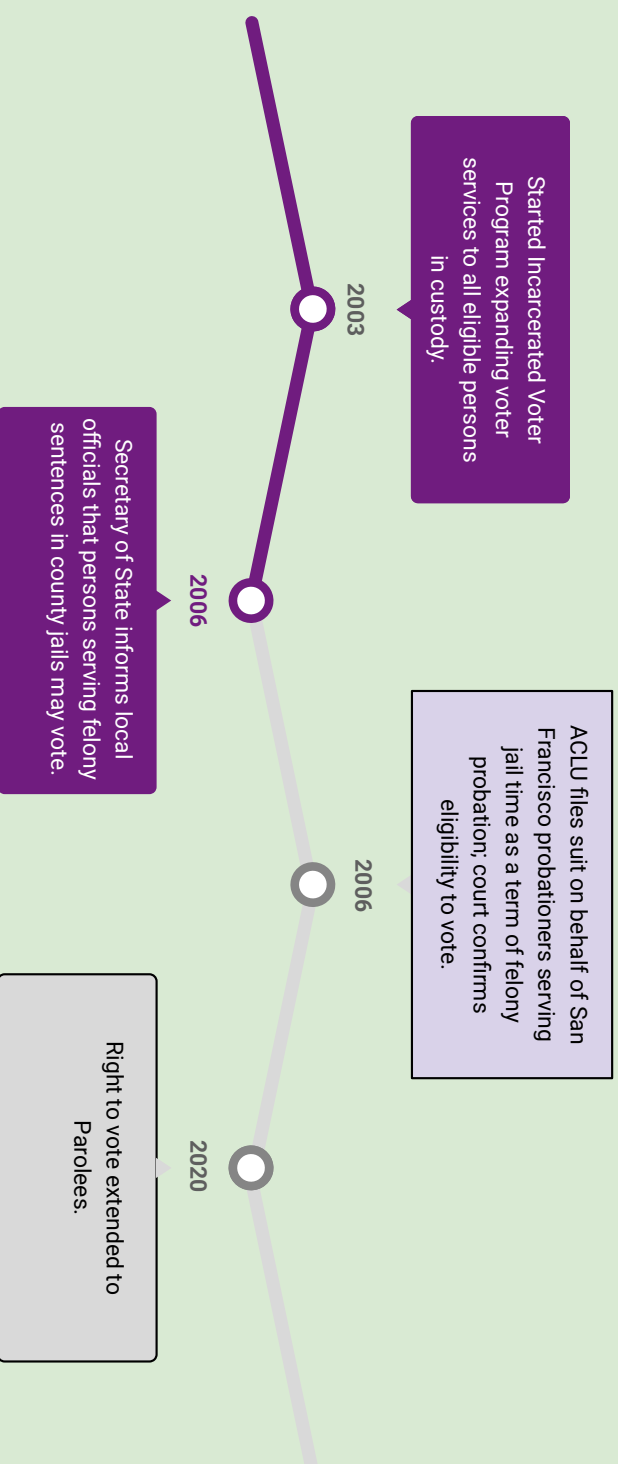
# *Help remove barriers to reentry.....*

- **Housing Support** - Rent Arrangements, Eviction Assistance, Personal Property Arrangements
- **Family Support** - Child Custody, Care, Support, and Visitation; Marriage/Marriage Dissolution
- **Financial Matters** - Powers of Attorney, Public Benefits, Settlement Funds, Trust Account Assistance
- [Care and Custody of Pets](#)
- **Notary Services**
- **Releases** - Correction of Release Date Miscalculations, Calculation and Application of Milestone Credits, Removal of Warrants to Facilitate Program Releases
- **Voting**

Service Focus: Voting!



*Today, all persons incarcerated in a California county jail may vote unless they are serving a state or federal prison sentence for the conviction of a felony.*



# Incarcerated Voter Program

- In 2003, PLS implemented a first-of-its-kind voter outreach program in a California county jail.
- In close partnership with the San Francisco Department of Elections we have since provided voter services to tens of thousands of eligible incarcerated voters.
- In 2022, alone, we provided voter outreach to 3,164 incarcerated voters.
- Our program is a model for other jurisdictions across the state and nation.

How do incarcerated persons find out about PLS? How  
can they get in touch?

# Prisoner Legal Services

**I HAVE GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CRIMINAL LAW OR THE STAGES OF A CRIMINAL CASE LIKE:**

WHO ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A BOWSLAFT?  
WHAT IS A 995 MOTION?  
WHAT HAPPENS AT A PRETRIAL CONFERENCE?

**What property can I take with me to state prison?**

**I'VE BEEN SERVED WITH LEGAL PAPERS FOR:**

AN EJECTION  
A FORTNICE  
ASSET FROSTEN  
CHILD SUPPORT

**What are the rules that govern the jails?**

**I need to give my friend power of attorney so she can pay my rent for me.**

**I WANT TO KNOW SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT MY CASE LIKE:**

WHAT ARE MY CURRENT CHARGES?  
WHAT IS MY NEXT COURT DATE FOR?  
WHAT WOULD I BE SENTENCED TO?

**I need my attorney's phone number and address.**

**I WANT TO FILE LEGAL PAPERS LIKE:**

A CLAIM AGAINST THE CITY  
A CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT  
A SMALL CLAIM COMPLAINT



## LEGAL INFORMATION

We can send you information or help you find it yourself in the law library.



## DIRECT SERVICES

We can help with many of the problems that come up because you are in jail.



## COURT FILINGS

We can help you to file the right forms in the right court at the right time.



## CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT

We can help you solve problems that concern jail housing conditions and the treatment of prisoners.

TO GET IN TOUCH WITH US, ASK YOUR ROOMING DEPUTY FOR A PEOPLE LEGAL REQUEST FORM OR CALL 415-559-2472 AND LEAVE A MESSAGE. WE PROCESS ALL NON-EMERGENCY REQUESTS IN THE ORDER THEY ARE RECEIVED. THANKS FOR YOUR PATIENCE!

### San Francisco County Jail Legal Request Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns \_\_\_\_\_ Attorney \_\_\_\_\_ Jail \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Six Digit SF# \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_ TX Date (if known) \_\_\_\_\_ Next Court Date \_\_\_\_\_

Are you sentenced? \_\_\_\_\_

Prisoner Legal Services provides prisoners with legal information, limited legal assistance, and facilitates law library access in the San Francisco County Jails. Use this form if you have a **legal** problem or a **legal** question. **Use a general action request for non-legal problems.** Read **both sides** of this form carefully—it may answer your questions.

I need legal information about the following:

- |   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney Problem<br>(See #1 below)       | <input type="checkbox"/> 1381/Warrants<br>Information<br>(See #2&4 reverse)        | <input type="checkbox"/> SFPD Property/<br>Release               | <input type="checkbox"/> Claim against San<br>Francisco                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parole Revocation<br>(See #5-6 reverse)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Power of Attorney<br>Notary Services<br>(See #13 reverse) | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Tickets<br>(See #3 reverse)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Release Date Problem<br>(See #15 reverse)                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Probation Revocation<br>(See #7 reverse) | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Mail, Copies,<br>Filings<br>(See #19 reverse)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce<br>(See #9 reverse)             | <input type="checkbox"/> Incarcerated Parents<br>& Child Support Info.<br>(See #16 reverse) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flash Incarceration<br>(See #8 reverse)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Immigration   | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Programs<br>(See #10 reverse) | <input type="checkbox"/> Crime Information<br>(See #12 reverse)                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Milestone Credits<br>(See #18 reverse)   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Law Library<br>(See #11 reverse)        | <input type="checkbox"/> Voting<br>(See #16 reverse)  |

**PLEASE NOTE: PRISONER LEGAL SERVICES DOES NOT MAKE PHONE CALLS FOR INMATE.**  
Describe your problem below. **USE DETAILS AND BE SPECIFIC.** If you have a warrant num provide it.

**(1) ATTORNEY PROBLEMS.** If you have been arraigned and do not know who your attorney is, call the Public Defender's Office at 555 7th Street, SF, CA 94103. If you need contact information for a lawyer, call the Public Defender's Office at 555 7th Street, SF, CA 94103. If you need contact information for a lawyer, call the Public Defender's Office at 555 7th Street, SF, CA 94103. If you need contact information for a lawyer, call the Public Defender's Office at 555 7th Street, SF, CA 94103.



# Services to the SFSO

- Policy and Procedure Review and Development
- Audits/Reports
- Alert to Areas of Noncompliance
- Media Interviews of Incarcerated Persons
- Legal/Professional Video Visiting
- Truth Act Compliance
- Trainings/Education

# Services to the Community

- Speaking Engagements/Panel Participants
- Liaison to Defense Bar and Justice Partners
- Intern Programs
  - ❑ Full Time/10-week summer law student internship
  - ❑ UC Law SF Prisoner Outreach Program
  - ❑ Stanford Law School Pro Bono Project

# PLS SUMMER INTERNS 2023





# CHALLENGES

Staffing

Support

Communication

Questions?