

Dear Honorable Supervisors,

Our Sheriff is asking the community to support him in requesting more funds for the sheriff department to increase the number of deputies. In recognition of both the important role they play in maintaining our safety with regard to armed robberies and kidnappings; and in recognition of Black Lives Matter, calls for greater humanity, training with regard to mental health and de-escalation, and more social workers among their ranks, I ask that we as the public/citizens of Mendocino County engage about what we want our Sheriff's Department to do and how we want them to act.

While the civil rights movement for BLM continues, there are mixed messages and it appears little has been done so far to bridge the gap by first exploring with the public what they believe will be helpful to our community. We pay the Sheriff a huge portion of our tax dollars: Have we participated in defining what we request of them?

I would like to share my voice and experiences in regards to having an incarcerated family member.

A sheriff is there to force order when we, as a society, have failed to find equilibrium or meet the needs of those who turn to crime. What is being described in the BLM civil rights movement is how, archetypically, cops when at their worst, are similar to a disciplinary abusive father – they are granted authority over other people's bodies and do not always have the emotional maturity to handle it. Harm can be done.

In child psychology we have evolved to understand that punishment does not improve behavior. Men are embracing emotional sensitivity, while, if they are healthy, recognizing that the concept of toxic masculinity does not mean that throwing out masculinity all together is healthy. A firm hand and a boundary are important. As a white woman I benefit from our police force in the traditional sense. Yet I know it must evolve to meet the demand for social justice as well as to reduce crime systematically. By still holding the firm boundary, but doing so from a humanitarian perspective, pain, suffering, and crime can be reduced in our communities.

My current experiences with the sheriff's department support my long standing belief that they are part of the problem of our failure as a society to reduce the issues that lead to crime, even in Mendocino. We are also part of the problem. I hope the small stories I tell will illustrate the need for a new direction in how we police. I want to see our sheriff request funding for a well-rounded program that shows his department's understanding of the need for supporting continued deep emotional development, a program that meets the times of our largest civil rights movement of a lifetime. A program that will be revolutionary, not because we cancel culture our police force and replace them, but because together we recognize the need for internal revolution, of the heart, of the maturity of a man to both hold a boundary without showing anger, of the maturity of a police person to have compassion and force with sensitivity and care in every movement, and the maturity of our community to step up and support them

in this process.

I would like to ask our policemen to become some of the smartest, wisest, emotionally mature men we know. I would like them to feel and understand vulnerability in a safe place. I would like our community to create that safe place.

My brother is an addict and has been in and out of jail. He uses drugs to the point of what I would describe as self-induced schizophrenia. I believe he needs to be hospitalized and off the street. After a year in prison the state paid for him to attend rehab. Because he was previously addicted to heroin, they gave him a subscription of Suboxone while in rehab (an opiate). He and the other occupants got caught for smoking pot and were kicked out. Cannabis is not a drug we consider to be an issue in his life, while opiates like Suboxone are, and it is my family's opinion that he should not be prescribed this drug.

He was supposed to serve another six months of prison or rehab, but instead, they let him out. His probation officer said he couldn't leave the city limits of Ukiah and couldn't get a job because he had to go back to rehab or prison at some unknown point in the future. His MediCal was held up, so he couldn't fill the Suboxone prescription, and went to the ER to get it filled a couple of times, and tried to get help with the MediCal at Plowshares. Withdrawals from Suboxone results in about three weeks of vomiting, plus a longer period of sleeplessness. He was sleeping on the street during this time.

The parole officer required that my brother check in regularly, but did not accept phone calls. Instead he wanted to text. My brother borrowed a flip phone so he could call, but it did not have a texting plan. The parole officer would not answer a phone call, except on Wednesdays. When the family called him he sounded angry. We paid for a texting plan for my brother, but texting on a flip phone is not easy. Requiring someone with mental health issues to go through extra hoops for phone texting communication shows a deep lack of training and ineptitude. A social worker would recognize the many ways in which these interactions are guaranteed to result in failure.

As a homeless person, my brother was woken up in the middle of the night by police and told if they saw him again that night they would take him to jail. Later in the week when they searched him for no reason that I know of and found paraphernalia, he was riding my bike. He asked if he could lock it up so I could get it later. They refused. So he gave it to a homeless woman standing nearby. Small acts of kindness go a long way, and waiting a minute to lock up a bike should not be an inconvenience that is above them.

When he went to jail we believe that he did not receive a free phone call. We did complain but the person who answered was defensive and we let it go. Advocating for an incarcerated family member is exhausting. Our mother did receive a paid phone call, a call that required someone to run and get a credit card (not a collect call). She was not quick enough and it hung up. This lack of phone call resulted in us missing his arraignment. In an effort to contact him we called the jail and after a few days they called back to say we needed to schedule a video call. We did

so and got family members together from multiple parts of the County, but the Jail did not show up. We were charged for the twenty minutes we waited on-line anyway. In the past when we tried to visit him in jail, if we were one minute late we were told we had missed the appointment, but if we were on time, we often had to wait thirty minutes to an hour before someone even checked in with us. The feeling I get is that, because we are associated with a criminal, we are subhuman and don't need to be treated with common respect. I am an educated white woman and I imagine that it is even more difficult for immigrants, the mentally ill, and people of color. Our Sheriff department can do better today by simply implementing common courtesy.

The parole officer decided that since my brother had failed to stay off drugs they weren't going to pay for rehab anymore, and instead they are just going to let him out. What has been the point of this charade?

Today the Sheriff is asking for more money. Despite our mis-giving's with police methods, their seemingly inherent emotional violence, and their lack of regard for humans and the property of those they think may be doing something illegal, it is important to recognize that they provide protection for many of us and, ultimately, there is a place for us to say Thank You, to them every day. So, how do we deal with this disparity between Keeping the Peace and the lack of Police Humanity?

I ask that Mendocino County consider a proposal that addresses closing the gap between this disparity. I support giving the police department more money to make systematic changes and integrating social workers into their department, thus freeing up officers to address the issues of robbery and assault of which Sheriff Kendall speaks. Every aspect of the role that a parole officer held with my brother could have been performed better by a social worker. My brother who will be released in three days and is still trying to get into a rehab program, but does not have the support of that officer in simple things like communicating with his family, getting a TB and a Covid tests, and interviewing with rehab staff. Maybe the officer believes he has other pressing work. If so he should be freed up to do it by someone who can do his job better.

This failure, while seemingly small, is monumental because it is repeated over and over again with families across our county. Families that have someone who is an addict and in the system rarely have time to write articles, so their voices aren't heard.

I would suggest that today the position of police person is a difficult one. As a society we act as if police must embody the power of the young and testosterone-filled male that is detached and angry. Yet today I am asking for emotional compassion and sensitivity – how do we find balance? This is what I ask of our police force – I ask them to become incredibly mature men and women. I ask them to harness power and youthful strength while also practicing the search for emotional wisdom through reading and training and emoting. I ask them to ask for help in areas in which they are not trained. I ask them to have the humility to recognize that this is a practice and they will never be perfect, and that is OK, but when they take this job they take on the responsibility of practicing kindness every day.

This practice will take time to develop, and in the interim I ask that if you are an officer, you start this humanitarian effort now (maybe you already do this, in which case, I don't mean to sound condescending, and in which case, you probably already understand the greater need for more of this). If you are an officer that does this I would like to hear about it if you are willing to share. I would like to hear someone from the department write or speak about how they integrate these concepts. I suggest that every officer read Bell Hooks' book "The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love".

Sheriff Kendall, I suggest you offer a proposal to the Board of Supervisors that begins to integrate some of these concepts into the department and explains what you are already doing. Specifically, I hope that any proposal would include hiring of social workers to do some of your mental health calls, communication and outreach; consulting with psychologists in our community about how the department can grow to meet the demand for social justice and awareness; taking trainings on racism and anti-racism; and improving the interface between inmates and their families so that outside support for recovery can be facilitated.

Like a society has the opportunity to grow, that patriarchal, rule enforcing aspects of society may evolve to have more capacity than to just force and punish. You can lead. Thank you for your service and let's take this to the next level.

Sincerely,

Anna Birkas