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*San Francisco
Public Library*



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SF COUNTY JAIL FIRST IN THE NATION TO PROVIDE FREE ACCESS TO CONTENT-RICH TABLET COMPUTERS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS

Joint Effort to Bridge Digital Divide for In-Custody Persons Made Possible by Mayor's Office, Sheriff's Office, Public Library, Treasurer's Office, and SF Jail Justice Advocates

San Francisco, CA - The San Francisco Sheriff's Office has completed the launch of its groundbreaking tablet program with access to never-before-offered free content for incarcerated people in its county jails. The project is hailed as a national model of smart justice reform, and expands on services offered during the pilot program first implemented by the SF Sheriff's Office's Five Keys Charter School in 2014.

"With help from our City partners, we have been able to build up this program to offer a broad range of free media that has never been afforded to people in any jail, and will take the financial burden off of incarcerated people's families," said **Sheriff Miyamoto**. "This is ultimately about reducing recidivism and bolstering crime prevention. Giving people the tools they need in order to learn and access media can be a motivating factor as they look toward a life beyond jail."

Nine years ago, the Sheriff's Office initiated free tablet technology to enhance education and learning for people in its custody. The need for more tablets became amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person visiting and programming were suspended. The Mayor's Office committed to provide \$500,000 annually from the City's General Fund to support the program's implementation and maintenance. Unlike other similar tablet programs in jails and prisons nationwide which charge incarcerated people fees, this initiative ensures that every service is free to people at San Francisco County jails. At no cost, they can view important legal and reentry resources, make commissary orders and medical requests, and submit grievances.

"This is an important enhancement to our justice system that will help continue our reform work that eliminates the high costs of incarceration," said **Mayor London N. Breed**. "People in our jail system should have access to technology resources that afford them the opportunity to develop new skills and stay connected while they serve their time."

Thanks to the San Francisco Public Library, which leveraged its hoopla Digital platform, incarcerated people now have the ability to stream a wide range of free media including e-books, entertainment, and music, curated by longtime Jail & Reentry Services Librarians Rachel Kinnon, Dr. Jeanie Austin, and Nili Ness.

"San Francisco Public Library is proud to be at the forefront of this transformative work in partnership with the San Francisco Sheriff's Office and the Treasurer's Financial Justice Project," says **City Librarian Michael Lambert**. "We know that low literacy and barriers to education contribute to the prison pipeline, and that having access to information and library

services can change the trajectory of someone's life. We are committed to improving the outcomes for our justice-involved patrons and to set a new standard of service for our industry."

The rollout of hundreds of tablets, provided by **Nucleos**, a company that supports digital education and vocational training programming in jails and prisons, was made possible through a partnership between the Mayor's Office, the SF Sheriff's Office, the SF Public Library, the Financial Justice Project in the Treasurer's Office, and the SF Jail Justice Coalition.

"Supposedly 'free' tablets too often cost incarcerated people and their families a fortune," said **San Francisco Treasurer José Cisneros**, whose Financial Justice Project advocated for a free tablet with no hidden fees. "The tablets are loaded up with charges like three cents a minute to read an e-book. Private corporations and government split the profits, while incarcerated people's grandmothers are socked with a bill they can't afford."

These high costs disproportionately fall on incarcerated people's families, most of whom are low income and people of color, as most incarcerated individuals make little or no income. People in SF jails can use the tablets to look up legal questions on the device's law library, read books, communicate with teachers, and eventually, speak with family members.

"It's not about sitting back and listening to music all day, it does provide resources and information on how to break the cycle, and... it helps with mental health," said David Thornton, from County Jail #3, who has been studying law and learning code via the tablet. "I use it mostly for the law library. I do a lot of research. I enjoy helping people with the law aspect. I sit down and show them how to search their particular case. Sometimes there's somebody you can help, you can uplift, in a situation where you feel so helpless."

"It's extraordinary," said Phillip Pitney, from CJ#3, of the tablets. Pitney has taken several classes, from learning about careers in the food industry to substance abuse to parenting. "It gets emotional, you think about your kids while you're doing the class. If I had taken the parenting class first, before I had kids, I would have been a way better father."

The **San Francisco Jail Justice Coalition** was a key partner in the design and implementation of the tablet program. The coalition is composed of community-based organizations, formerly incarcerated people, and family members who are supporting incarcerated loved ones.

"If my loved one, who is currently incarcerated in another county, had access to a free tablet, it would be extremely valuable as it would require less funds than what I currently contribute towards paying tablet fees. Not to mention it may help him learn to navigate a newer electronic device that he hasn't had access to in the past," said **Valentina Seden, Program Manager, Young Community Developers**.

"It's crucial that we ensure incarcerated people are connected to their support systems, have an opportunity to learn and prepare for their reentry, and are protected from the predatory practices of opportunistic corporations with weak moral compasses," said **Bianca Tylek, Executive Director, Worth Rises**.

The tablet program is one of a number of City reforms to eliminate the high costs of incarceration, including making jail phone calls free and curbing price markups in the jail store, commonly known as commissary. In 2020, San Francisco passed the People Over Profits ordinance, which prevents the City from making revenue from incarcerated people and their families.

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