



September 25, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

Sheriff Paul Miyamoto
San Francisco Sheriff's Office
1 Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: Blanket strip search policy

Dear Sheriff Miyamoto:

We write on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Northern California. We have received numerous complaints about the Sheriff's blanket strip search policy for jail visits. Respectfully, we strongly urge you to reconsider this policy. It is causing harm to people who are detained, deterring them from visiting with friends, family, other members of their support networks, and perhaps most alarmingly, from attending legal visits with their counsel.

We recognize that the Sheriff has broad discretion in managing the jail. We also share the Sheriff's concern with contraband. No one wants to see overdose deaths. But strip searches—universally applied to all detained people, for all visits, without exception—is a very heavy and, we would argue, overbroad mechanism to address this issue.

As you are no doubt aware, a strip search is a significant invasion of personal privacy. It is dehumanizing and causes feelings of shame and violation.¹ A Justice of the United States Supreme Court called strip searches “inherently harmful, humiliating, and degrading.”² This is particularly true for people with a history of

¹ See, e.g., Antoine Davis, *Dehumanization: The Incarcerated Experience*, 21 SEATTLE J. SOC. JUST. 689 (2023), available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol21/iss3/9/>; Meg Gould, *Cruel and Unusual Trauma: How Eighth Amendment Principles Governing Conditions of Confinement Should Apply to Juvenile Strip Searches*, 52 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 1009, 1015-18 (2021).

² *Florence v. Board of Chosen Freeholders of County of Burlington*, 566 U.S. 318, 343 (2012) (Breyer, J., dissenting); see also *Henry v. Hulett*, 969 F.3d 769, 781 (7th Cir.

trauma or abuse—a population that is overrepresented among those detained.³ More frequent strip searches have also been shown to correlate with more frequent incidents of sexual assault by corrections officers.⁴

As a result of these harms, people will go to great lengths to avoid circumstances that lead to a strip search, even foregoing things they care about and which are in their best interests.⁵ We have received numerous reports of people telling their families not to visit and refusing to come out to meet with their attorneys. Strip searches are a powerful deterrent.

This has ripple effects. Visiting with friends and family is critical to morale, which in turn impacts safety and security in the jail. Visits are a critical release valve for the people in your charge—without it, we expect the pressure to rise, leading to greater tensions among those who are detained, and between detainees and staff.

Blanket strip searches are also slowing down the court system. We have received reports that, because detainees are not showing up to attorney visits, attorneys are appearing in court and seeking continuances because they have been unable to confer with their clients. This creates backlog, prejudicing all criminal defendants. It also means longer waits for those held pre-trial, again aggravating morale and potentially worsening conditions in the jail.

We urge you to explore alternative policies and practices that better ensure an efficient administration of the jails without prejudice to the courts or harm to the people in your custody. There are alternatives available. For example, creating a process for recognizing which detainees and which visitors may meet without strip searches would alleviate many of the harms while still mitigating against the risks

2020) (people in custody “maintain a right to bodily privacy during visual inspections of their bodies”).

³ See, e.g., Kao, Jennifer C *et al.*, “Associations between past trauma, current social support, and loneliness in incarcerated populations,” *Health & Justice* vol. 2 7. (Apr. 1, 2014), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/2194-7899-2-7> (finding higher rates of trauma, and an association between past trauma and lower social support among people who are detained or incarcerated).

⁴ Camille Sanches, *Rights Stripped down: A Fourth Amendment Challenge to Cross-Gender Strip Searches of Transgender Inmates*, 58 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 831, 838-40 (Summer 2023).

⁵ See, e.g., *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 593 (1979) (Marshall, J., dissenting) (“the price of such searches is so high as to lead detainees to forgo visits with friends and family altogether”); see also Abigail Van Neely, “Want to see your attorney in S.F. jail? Prepare to be strip-searched.” *Mission Local* (September 12, 2025), available at: <https://missionlocal.org/2025/09/sf-strip-searching-inmates-after-attorney-visits/> (SF Office of the Public Defender stating clients refusing visits.)

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of contraband. Other options are also available, and we would be happy to discuss them or the contents of this letter at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this pressing matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the email address below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Avram D. Frey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'A' and 'F'.

Avram D. Frey
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