

Office of the San Francisco District Attorney

REPORT ON THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED ADVISORY (FIA) BOARD: THE INSPIRATION, INCEPTION, AND IMPACT



What is the Formerly Incarcerated Advisory (FIA) Board?

Founded in 2016, the Formerly Incarcerated Advisory Board (“Board”), a board composed of formerly incarcerated individuals, many of whom were ‘lifers’ in prison before being granted parole, is the first board of its kind to shed light on the criminal justice system through the lens of those who have been directly impacted by the system. These individuals are standouts. They demonstrated remarkable growth as they served their sentences and have become valuable sources of insight and perspective in our continued efforts to make the criminal justice system more effective. Their views on what led them to commit their crimes and their experiences while incarcerated shed light on the efficacy of our system and the needs of this population to successfully reintegrate as successful contributing members of our society. The San Francisco District Attorney’s Office (SFDA) is the first prosecutor’s office to have a formerly incarcerated advisory board and we are proud to share how the contributions of this group further our mission.

Members of our Board meet regularly with the DA to discuss meaningful efforts to create supportive systems for safe and productive reintegration of formerly incarcerated men and women into society. Members of the Board have a passion for: building robust mentorship programs to connect with at-risk youth, providing re-entry services to those leaving prison, and educating the public about their experiences while incarcerated and their positive contributions as reintegrating members of society.

Michael Mendoza (FIA Board member):



I remember ‘tagging’ a school sign and being immediately expelled from school. My behavior wasn’t a violent act; it was a stupid and childish thing to do. We need to be more thoughtful about how we deal with at-risk youth in situations like these. We need to use more tools than just penal solutions. We need to start within the schools and let kids know that we will continue to work with them even if they make bad decisions, to cut the pipeline to prison.

Why the FIA Board?

There is a growing movement in our country to better understand what effective and lasting criminal justice reform looks like. Essential to this movement is incorporating all perspectives, especially

those of individuals who have experienced the system firsthand and are committed to making it more just for all.

The Board consists of a group of thoughtful change-makers and leaders committed to rethinking what true criminal justice reform requires. They bring a wealth of knowledge and nuance to our understanding of the types of supportive services that recently released men and women need to stay out of the criminal justice system. Board members inform policies around sentencing, parole, and re-entry. It is pivotal that they have seats at the table because many of them are currently navigating these systems themselves.

Marshall Khine, SFDA Chief of Criminal Division:



Oftentimes, it is very easy for prosecutors to look at defendants as case files. You are on the opposite side of the courtroom, and everything is filtered through a defense attorney. My conversations with incarcerated individuals gave me a better perspective on seeing every defendant in court as a person, and the impact that prosecution will have throughout the course of their life.

Importance of Social Inclusion

Social inclusion post-release has a significant role in aiding a formerly incarcerated individual's reentry into society. The FIA Board works to enhance social inclusion by creating clearer pathways for formerly incarcerated men and women to rejoin the workforce, the housing market, educational environments, and community based organizations. The Board cares deeply about removing barriers to these institutions for the formerly incarcerated because they understand their value firsthand; our Board members have found success in reintegrating into society and recognize the positive relationship between a person's sense of inclusion and their likelihood to reoffend. Our Board members are living examples of this relationship: they have put in the hard work to get released from prison and have been able to rejoin society as positive influencers. Our Board members have a recidivism rate of zero.

For this reason, the Board is committed to helping make their post-release experiences more of a norm for others in similar positions. Board members aim to support the efforts of former offenders after prison to change and improve their circumstances. They work on initiatives to generate positive interactions between those going through the criminal justice system and law enforcement, leading to a newer and deeper understanding of the other side and cultivating a culture of respect.

Sabrina Reid (FIA Board member):



Every single one of the guys coming out of prison was complex, awesome, interesting, smart, yet broken. It was as if upon leaving prison, a reset button had been pressed, giving them an opportunity to start from scratch. Whatever happens in the next month and a half or so will shape who they become for the rest of their lives, and making sure this journey was successful became my passion.

In conjunction with the FIA Board, DA Gascón has taken other substantial steps to reduce over-incarceration. He has pioneered alternative approaches to traditional prosecution through Neighborhoods Courts, the Young Adult Court, the San Francisco Sentencing Commission, and Make it Right. As the first district attorney's office to create a formerly incarcerated advisory board, DA Gascón has gained valuable insight and forged meaningful relationships with Board members. This valuable partnership serves to better the criminal justice system for our community. We are hopeful that your office can benefit from a similar partnership as well.

Impact of the FIA Board

As prosecutors, one of our responsibilities is to hold offenders accountable. Our Board gives us a more nuanced understanding of what this means. Many of our members have shared that their incarceration was necessary to change their harmful and detrimental life trajectories. Through their rehabilitative experiences in prison, we better understand the structures and programming incarcerated men and women need during their incarceration. Through their experiences as returning members to society, they help us understand the tools and access this population needs to successfully rejoin our communities. Through our Board, we understand that true accountability includes both removing offenders from our streets now and setting them up for success down the road so we are safer as a community over the long run.

In addition to serving the community, the Board gives a voice to its members, who were directly affected by the criminal justice system yet traditionally excluded from shaping it. The members engage with and give back to the community and local government by helping to enhance public safety and education.

Our Board members have an opportunity to lift the stigma of incarceration. In addition to informing our work, members can use this space to share both re-entry achievements and challenges with the group, creating a sense of community and inclusion. The Board serves as a space to build meaningful relationships with other participants and members of our office.

Aly Tambours (FIA Board Member):



I would really like to see this country move to a place where when you finish your sentence, you have at least the same opportunities that you had before you were incarcerated. I do believe in personal responsibility. However, I also believe that in some instances, people try, and then they give up and go back to old behavior just because there are so many barriers in front of them. For those who really want to move forward, we need to make sure that those opportunities are available to them.

Inspiration of the FIA Board: SFDA/San Quentin News Forum

The FIA Board stemmed from prior collaborative effort between the SFDA’s Office and San Quentin State Prison, the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum (“Forum”). The Forum allows members of the SFDA’s Office to regularly meet, build relationships with, and learn from current inmates at San Quentin. The Forum is designed around several topics: childhood and the juvenile justice system, their criminal acts, their experiences in prison, rehabilitation, and reentry.

Creation of the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum

The idea behind the SQ News Forum first developed after a prosecutor from the SFDA’s Office attended a general newspaper meeting at San Quentin. The meeting, held by a former newspaper owner and advisor, Steve McNamara, and facilitated by the editor-in-chief, Arnulfo Garcia, of the San Quentin Newspaper, focused on skills development for managing a successful publication. As the men interacted, they shared their personal insights on the role of incarceration has played in their lives and their ideas for impacting positive change beyond the walls of San Quentin. It quickly became apparent that the men had as much to impart as they had to learn.

Recognizing the value of the conversation within the broader arena of criminal justice reform, DA Gascón and a team from the office traveled to San Quentin a few months later to hear from the men themselves, inaugurate the first Forum and begin a growing relationship between the office and San Quentin.

In 2012, the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum was inaugurated. DA Gascón became the first district attorney to visit San Quentin, marking the beginning of a special relationship between the office and San Quentin. During the first visit, forum participants included SFDA Chief of Staff, Sentencing Planner, Director of Community Engagement, and Chief of the Criminal Division. About 40 people attended this half-day, zero-cost event.

In a roundtable, inmates and prosecutors discussed what they all hoped to learn from the Forum. Inmates shared insights on what brought them to their positions in their lives, experiences prior to committing their

offense, and their ideas on how to change their life courses. After hearing everything the conversations had to offer, DA Gascón knew that he wanted to expand the Forum and invite all of the members of his office to participate.

An Expanding Partnership

The SFDA's Office now regularly takes trips to San Quentin State Prison, with each visit including a growing number of prosecutors from the office, elected officials and judges from throughout the Bay Area. The most recent SFDA/San Quentin News Forum attendees include 32 prosecutors and 15 staff members who represent departments across the district attorney's office, 12 members from the FIA Board, and over 30 elected DAs from across the country.

In 2017, DA Gascón and members of the SFDA's Office led more than 40 elected district attorneys and representatives from other agencies throughout the United States to San Quentin. The visit occurred as part of the itinerary for the Major Counties Prosecutors Council ("MCPC") annual conference hosted by the SFDA's Office in 2017. The elected district attorneys in attendance came from New York, Baltimore, Chicago, Houston, and other major cities in between.

Future of the Forum

In the future, the office plans to make the Forum a mandatory part of the training curriculum for all new felony prosecutors. Our goal is that everyone in the San Francisco District Attorney's Office can better understand this aspect of the criminal justice system, the backgrounds of these men, and our impact on the system. We hope that such exposure results in more informed and equitable prosecution.

Forum to the FIA Board

The profound discussions during the San Quentin News Forum inspired District Attorney George Gascón to support the nation's first Formerly Incarcerated Advisory Board. Following the first Forum visit in 2012, 10 participants were released on parole from San Quentin. Of these men, 5 joined the FIA Board and are current members. They represent a portion of the Board's membership. The meaningful relationships they formed through the Forum inspired them to continue working with the DA and other Board members to address issues affecting the formerly incarcerated community.

Wade Chow, Chief of the Brady Appellate and Training Division, SFDA:



The SFDA/San Quentin News Forum shines a ray of hope in a bleak situation. I wish the larger population of incarcerated individuals, who might not have the opportunity to work on themselves as people in San Quentin do, can also get the chance to engage in meaningful conversations and impact changes on themselves and the criminal justice system.

Future of the FIA Board

The SFDA's Office hopes to share our work with other district attorney's offices and expand our efforts to positively impact the criminal justice system. Moving forward, the Board has several projects it will undertake:

- It will assist with creating a program similar to the SQ News Forum inside a women's prison to give female inmates the same opportunity to form relationships with district attorney's offices and impact the criminal justice system.
- The Board hopes to collaborate with the SFDA's Young Adult Court Office to provide transitional aged youth (18 -25 year olds) with more mentorship;
- Host an annual retreat with inmates at San Quentin to broaden the dialogue on best practices for successful reintegration.

Our office looks forward to continuing to work with our Board members to learn from their insights to enhance our work on plea bargains, sentencing decisions, re-entry programs, and parole processes. With their input, we will be able to pursue smarter prosecution and foster better re-entry services and youth mentorship programs. We hope that our Board's success will help community members and prosecutors recognize that successful reintegration, albeit difficult to achieve without adequate resources, is absolutely crucial to breaking cycles of crime.

Sharon Woo (Chief Assistant of Operations Department):



I am interested in discussing domestic violence with incarcerated individuals. I want to know whether or not it is more beneficial to have intervention earlier on in the system, whether we should have a lower charge rate but a higher conviction rate, and what is the most potent position one can take within the criminal justice system. These are questions that only people who have violated the law can answer for you.

Interested in Starting a FIA Board in Your Jurisdiction?

Recent trends in criminal justice policies demonstrate a departure from traditional prosecution. The FIA Board represents ones of these departures, and we trust that the growing dialogue it promotes has the potential to pave the way for a better criminal justice system nationwide.

Developing a formerly incarcerated advisory board is a valuable partnership for impacting criminal justice and rehabilitation reforms. A formerly incarcerated advisory board can offer meaningful experiences for members on both sides of the criminal justice system. Prosecutors have an opportunity to rethink important accountability measures through the perspectives of those they impact, and the formerly incarcerated have an opportunity to partner with those responsible for so many aspects of their lives.

Whether you are open to trying new approaches to reforming the criminal justice system or you have a pressing concern to deal with like gang violence, below are some tips for starting your own formerly incarcerated advisory board in your community:

Tips for Starting a Formerly Incarcerated Advisory Board

FIRST, decide on clear objectives that your formerly incarcerated advisory board hopes to accomplish. The specific goals of each board will be heavily dependent on the particular jurisdiction's needs and challenges. Thus, consider your jurisdiction's specific issues. Here are some questions to consider:

- What role might an advisory board of formerly incarcerated men and women play in addressing your particular needs?
- How might the experiences of the board inform current efforts your office is taking to tackle certain needs?
- Can your board play an educative role to help shape your community's views on experiences in jails and the re-integrative challenges the formerly incarcerated face?

SECOND, consider the members you would like to invite to be a part of your board. Keep in mind that people with different backgrounds will have unique perspectives about the criminal justice system. Different goals may mean different membership configurations and meetings. Think about your priorities for the upcoming year as you select the members that will make up your board. As you select board members, consider the following:

- Diversity is key. Consider age, gender, educational experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientation, political affiliations, as well as experiences within the criminal justice system. For example, those given life sentences will have different insights to contribute than others who may have been in-and-out the prison.
- To pave the way for productive conversations, make sure the members you invite represent as many communities as possible. Remember to be mindful of gender, as women are too often left out of these conversations, as are 'transitional-age' youths.

THIRD, the size of your board is important. We recommend keeping your board small enough so that conversations can be productive. The SFDA's FIA Board has approximately 15 to 25 members at any given time. Here are some factors to consider in determining the size of your board:

- The ideal number of board members will depend on your jurisdiction's specific needs.
- Members of the SFDA's FIA Board has significant influence in both the vetting process and selection of any new members, but our office also contributes by recommending candidates.
- Relationships should develop organically, and it is important that all members are comfortable with each other in order for the board to serve as the safe space it was designed to be.

FOURTH, it is a good idea to meet quarterly, making adjustments depending on the timeliness of the group's goals and people's schedules. Scheduling an annual can be a helpful tool for identifying the board's objectives for the year.

FIFTH, select a co-chair. It can be helpful if your group selects a co-chair to assist in identifying topics for the agenda, and to keep track of long term projects.

FINALLY, logistics also need to be decided, including where and how many times the board will meet. Here are some tips to consider:

- Identify the members on your board and be mindful of their daily work commitments when scheduling.
- You may want to consider having different configurations of the group for various purposes—for example, you may want to have subcommittees for different topics or projects, or meetings with or without the elected DA to allow for more informal discussions.
- Think about whether you want to publicize the names and biographies of your board members.
- Consider whether content discussed at meetings should be made public, or whether meetings should be recorded. Our experience suggests that making the contents of these meetings private facilitates greater open dialogue within the group. Have processes for deciding how you will reach consensus on these questions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our formerly incarcerated advisory board is an innovative approach to enhance public safety; it provides previously unattainable insights from those impacted by the very system we work to improve every day. Through the Board, we now have better understanding of drivers of crime, factors that cause recidivism, and ways that formerly incarcerated people may successfully reintegrate into the community. The Board's ability to share their stories make them a powerful resource for generating positive change in the criminal justice system and our community.

Forming this Board has been an incredible journey for both members of the SFDA's Office and formerly incarcerated individuals. Though many, upon first learning about the FIA Board, were hesitant to work with people on the other side of the criminal justice system, every board member has thereafter found the experience valuable and transformative. While it is an unlikely partnership, it has proven to be insightful and has helped weaken the stigma surrounding this population. At the same time, it has given formerly incarcerated individuals a voice and an opportunity to get involved in their communities and improve the lives of those impacted by the criminal justice system.

We wish you the best of luck in starting your own, and hope that your initiatives will enrich your perspectives and understanding as the FIA Board has done for our office.

For any questions regarding our board, please contact Marisa Rodriguez, Assistant District Attorney and Director of Community Relations, at marisa.rodriguez@sfgov.org.

FIA BOARD SPOTLIGHTS

Michael Mendoza: Breaking Barriers for Youth Offenders



Michael Mendoza is breaking barriers. After his incarceration, he became heavily involved in policy reform efforts. As a member of the FIA Board, he co-drafted a memo on the experience of individuals on parole. This memo strived to extend the 50-mile travel radius restriction and set up a parole credit system allowing individuals to earn credits that reduce their time on parole. This memo was eventually sent to the legislative counsel in Sacramento; although the legislation the memo informed came close, it did not pass. This experience encouraged Mendoza to continue to work for criminal justice reform.

“It was a good learning experience, especially for formerly incarcerated individuals like me,” said Mendoza. “To see what it’s like to create a bill and experience the legislative process gives hope to people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system.”

As a juvenile offender, Mendoza gained hope of coming home after the passage of SB 260, a youth offender bill that set up a new parole process for those who were minors at the time of their crimes. Having benefited from legislative reforms, Mendoza wants to utilize policy solutions to prevent more youths from making the same bad decisions that he did.

“I remember ‘tagging’ a school sign and being immediately expelled from school. My behavior wasn’t a violent act; it was a stupid and childish thing to do,” Mendoza said. “We need to be more thoughtful about how we deal with at-risk youth in situations like these. We need to use more tools than just penal solutions. We need to start within the schools and let kids know that we will continue to work with them even if they make bad decisions, to cut the pipeline to prison.”

Now, having earned a Political Science degree from the San Francisco State University, Mendoza works as a policy director in the Anti-Recidivism Coalition and as a clinical case manager in criminal justice.

Sabrina Reid: Highlighting the Good in People



Sabrina Reid is a member of the FIA Board. She also works in restorative justice through programs like Community Works West and No Violence Alliance, helping formerly incarcerated individuals find employment, and successfully reenter society.

Having spent a significant portion of her life incarcerated, Reid is well aware of the cycle of incarceration from which many fail to break free.

“I would get a few years clean and then relapse and go back to prison. I was comfortable in prison; I did well in institutions,” said Reid.

“There, I never did anything wrong, and I was successful and smart, but as soon as I got released, it would be too much and I would revert to my old behaviors.”

Reid’s life fundamentally changed when she became interested in restorative justice and started to help people coming out of prisons find jobs. She was committed to her job, even though funding was often insufficient. She credits her success to focusing on each individual she works with on a case-by-case basis, stressing that personal and meaningful interactions are the key.

“Every single one of the guys coming out of prison was complex, awesome, interesting, smart, yet broken,” said Reid. “It was as if upon leaving prison, a reset button had been pressed, giving them an opportunity to start from scratch. Whatever happens in the next month and a half or so will shape who they become for the rest of their lives, and making sure this journey was successful became my passion.”

Reid then became involved with the FIA Board. As a FIA Board member, Reid has found her voice, feeling compelled to keep her community informed and support positive law enforcement initiatives. Having realized the differences between the current criminal justice system and the one that she first went through, Reid remarks, “Times have changed for better.”

Reid points out that while many social-good organizations and nonprofits geared to working with this population end operations at 5 PM, the issues that they strive to solve usually manifest after work hours. In her work, Reid has harnessed the motivation and talents of the formerly incarcerated community to create substantial social progress. From working with the FIA Board and helping formerly incarcerated individuals with their careers, Reid has observed that for the formerly incarcerated community, helping others goes beyond a 9-5 job: it’s their life. The willingness to do anything to positively support the formerly incarcerated community, whenever needed, is invaluable.

Aly Tamboura: Finding Common-Ground Solutions



Aly Tamboura is an honorary member of the FIA Board and a participant in the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum. Today, he works in the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative as a program manager and for the San Francisco Human Rights Commission to advocate for the hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals in tech companies.

In San Quentin, he took advantage of the opportunities and programs offered to strive for personal transformation. He reflected upon his upbringing and old belief system, identifying the conservative environment in which he was raised and the American rhetoric of hypermasculinity as major contributors to his incarceration.

There, Tamboura participated in the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum, which led to his current association with the FIA Board. To him, the Board is important because it allows formerly incarcerated individuals to share their experience with prosecutors, discuss the positive and negative sides of their incarceration, and envision what could have led to a better outcome. Exchange of this kind is paramount for reforms striving for a more fair and just criminal justice system.

Tamboura also started a “street math” class while in San Quentin after seeing fellow inmates struggle in their math classes. Realizing that they simply needed a more familiar context, he phrased arithmetic and algebra problems in the context of practical questions that they would need to answer in their daily lives. With this foundation, the inmates grasped mathematical concepts much faster; it was a relatable approach.

Now, Tamboura is a steadfast advocate for criminal justice reforms, focusing on the possible role of technology in helping prosecutors gather information in areas such as the collateral consequences of incarceration, alternatives to traditional incarceration, and more efficient ways to incentivize good behavior.

“The court system hasn’t changed much, and it hasn’t adopted technology as much as it can,” Tamboura said. “There are a great amount of benefits in having prosecutors use technology to help them make better informed decisions.”

Additionally, Tamboura wants to lift the stigmatization off incarceration and provide more employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated individuals. He also advocates for increased collaboration and communication between different agencies, in order to create a system that is able to restore and heal all those involved in the criminal justice system.

Nate Williams: Investing in At-Risk Youth



Since reentering society, **Nate Williams** has started his own non-profit organization, Choices for Freedom. He also supports other organizations assisting high-risk populations, such as Cease Fire in Oakland.

Williams was a juvenile offender, and was inspired to turn his life around upon an impactful visit from his young daughter while in prison.

“I remember a time when my daughter was maybe 6 months old. There was glass between us; she was on the table, crying and banging on the glass,” William said. “I felt like I caused that and I was treating her the way my father treated me, and I didn’t want to make her cry

ever again.”

While incarcerated Williams started going to school and to church, and soon fell in love with Scared Straight, a youth diversion program. There, he told other kids to stay in school and live the American Dream. When one kid asked him if he had his high school diploma, he lied and said yes. Feeling hypocritical, Williams resigned the same day and started to work towards his GED, which opened the door to college and allowed Williams to attain an Associate’s degree.

Afterwards, Williams started to organize events, inviting non-profit owners and activists to speak to prisoners. He managed to secure stable funding, organized larger events, and eventually started his own non-profit organization, Choices for Freedom, through a program offered by Stanford University to formerly incarcerated individuals.

To this day, Williams works to deter youth from entering the criminal justice system. He goes to juvenile halls and prisons, and he helps kids reenter society when they come home. He is going to India to speak on global stages to global audiences on Gandhi's birthday, striving to connect with communities dealing with trauma.

SFDA SPOTLIGHTS



Sharon Woo, Prosecutor of 18 Years: Helping Fellow Humans Break the Cycle of Recidivism

Sharon Woo is the Chief Assistant of Operations in the SFDA's Office. She supervises attorneys and various divisions in the office. She participated in the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum on DA Gascón's first visit when he invited his entire executive team to visit San Quentin for the first forum.

There, Woo engaged in a roundtable discussion with approximately 45 inmates serving life sentences. Everybody at the table spoke about his or her life experiences, sharing candidly what had brought them to San Quentin and what they hoped to gain from the conversation.

Though Woo had previously been to other prisons, she found her experience eye-opening and incredibly humanizing. Being able to walk through the yard, get a tour of death row, and see the lives of inmates in prison gave her a new impression of the oppressive nature of San Quentin and a better understanding of the consequences of incarceration. She observes that it is important for prosecutors to comprehend the meaning of their discretion and authority. She reflected upon her earlier experience as a prosecutor in a more conservative county, a position that made her see defendants as numbers.

"For the first 10 years of my career, my metric of success was whether I was able to convict somebody. Being a prosecutor with no involvement with the defendants or their families is easier," said Woo. "Entering a management role in a place like San Francisco, however, gave me much broader experience with the criminal justice system and helped me stop viewing things in a silo."

According to Woo, because a significant percentage of incarcerated individuals return to their communities, public safety can be ensured only when individuals can exit custody as better people who will not recidivate. The cycle of revolving doors in the criminal justice system must be broken.



Wade Chow, Prosecutor of 22 Years: A Ray of Hope

Wade Chow is the Chief of the Brady Appellate and Training Division. Chow spoke of the value of meeting people in prison who have personally transformed themselves.

“Seeing the perspective of people in prison gives prosecutors a different insight into the human side of our job when we sentence people to long-term incarceration,” said Chow. “It allows us to better appreciate the ways in which people can change themselves.”

Chow reflected on the gravity of a prosecutor’s decision. He emphasized the necessity for prosecutors to understand the consequences of their decisions, and the importance to see the physical environment of the prison to sense what that deprivation feels like.

When Chow attended the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum, he was surprised by the manner which the men talked about their crimes.

“Many prisoners deny what they did or how bad it was. It is rare to speak to someone who is unguarded and frank about their crime, as the San Quentin men were” Chow said.

Chow observed that the inmates did not try to justify their crimes, and he cherished the sense of shared humanity facilitated by the honesty in the conversation. He recognized the amount of work that the inmates in San Quentin put into rehabilitating themselves despite what may look like a hopeless situation.

Chow would like more prosecutors to have the kind of opportunity to communicate with inmates like he had with this program. He recognized that San Quentin stands out in the quality and quantity of programming that it has.

“The Forum shines a ray of hope in a bleak situation,” said Chow. “I wish the larger population of incarcerated individuals, who might not have the opportunity to work on themselves as people in San Quentin do, can also get the chance to engage in meaningful conversations and impact changes on themselves and the criminal justice system.”



Ana Gonzalez, Prosecutor of 18 Years: An Unlikely Partnership

Ana Gonzalez is the Managing Attorney of the Gang Unit in the SFDA's Office. As a participant in the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum, Gonzalez found her opportunity to attend a forum to be "very interesting and valuable."

Speaking to a diverse group of inmates who were open about their experiences, Gonzalez started to think more about what could have changed these men's life trajectories.

Gonzalez noted that prosecutors are supposed to be a bulwark against crime, and that this experience showed her that they could fulfill their duty in a new way. Anna stressed the value of collaborating with this group of uniquely situated inmates. It is not every day that inmates are willing to share their stories and work with law enforcement.



Marshall Khine, Prosecutor of 20 Years: More than Just a Case File

Marshall Khine is the Chief of the Criminal Division in the SFDA's Office. As a participant in the SFDA/San Quentin News Forum, Khine engaged in individual conversations with a small group of inmates, learning personal information and narratives that case reports, records of investigation, and criminal rap sheets can never capture. Though Khine had previously visited other jails and prisons, he was surprised by how forthright these men were, and he found his experience in San Quentin very eye-opening and humanizing.

"Oftentimes, it is very easy for prosecutors to look at defendants as case files. You are on the opposite side of the courtroom, and everything is filtered through a defense attorney," said Khine. "My visit to San Quentin gave me a better perspective on seeing every defendant in court as a person, and the impact that prosecution will have throughout the course of their life."

According to Khine, the Forum is a valuable experience for every prosecutor, not just those in the SFDA's Office. Speaking with incarcerated individuals gives prosecutors a sense of optimism that they are not merely securing convictions and that people actually change while they are in prison. Such an experience reaffirms the work that prosecutors do, shows the possibility of redemption, and helps prosecutors understand the impact they have on defendants' lives. Prosecutors also learn to better help individuals whose changes have permanence find different pathways.