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GRADUATION FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE AT SF COUNTY JAIL *SFSO'S Five Keys Program Celebrates 20-year Anniversary with First In-Person High School Graduation at CJ#3 since Pandemic*

San Francisco, CA – More than a dozen incarcerated individuals earned their high school diplomas today as part of the Sheriff's Office's nationally acclaimed Five Keys Charter School. Sheriff Miyamoto, SFSO Command staff, Five Keys instructors, as well as graduates and their families attended the ceremony, which also marks Five Keys' 20th anniversary.

"Today's graduates represent a step towards progress, not just for themselves, but for our community," **said Sheriff Miyamoto**. "Nearly half of people in San Francisco County Jail lack a high school diploma, and enter our jail at a fifth grade reading level with few prospects for future employment. But we know that when they receive an education, their chances of returning to jail decrease significantly. That's true success."

Today's graduation is the first in-person ceremony to take place on site at the jail since the COVID pandemic started. More than 4000 incarcerated individuals from San Francisco County Jail have graduated from the program over the past 20 years, with 16 people receiving their diplomas today at County Jail #3 in San Bruno.

"To me, Five Keys has provided a second opportunity to get my education on track," **said Emerson Melendez**, age 26. "This program has helped me to trust once again in myself; that no matter how bad the situation can be, there is always a chance to do better. It also gave me the push that I needed to notice that it's never too late to follow my dreams and education."

"With my Mom here, it's a real graduation," **said Troy Savoy**, age 46. "It feels great to earn my diploma after leaving high school as a high school dad. Then 30 years later, I'm graduating the same year as my 17 year-old daughter. It's something special."

Five Keys was the brainchild of former SF Sheriff Mike Hennessey, who established the first-of-its-kind accredited charter high school for incarcerated persons in 2003, despite a lack of funds and opposition that running a school was not the job of the Sheriff's Office. The SFSO set about developing expertise as a school – a process that included shifting the culture of the jails,

making cells into schoolrooms, deputies into guidance counselors, and incarcerated persons into students. The charter school has since gone statewide to serve more than 30,000 Californians each year at 120 teaching sites, including 25 county jails.

“My goal was to teach the incarcerated because I could not wrap my head around people being locked away in jails and prisons without educational and/or rehabilitative services,” **said Terese Bravo, Five Keys Principal at SF County Jail.** “There are so many distractions in jail; the physical environment can be loud, students can be consumed by legal issues, and separation from family, losing custody of their children, as well as housing. I feel that any student capable of completing their high school diploma while incarcerated is a success story.”

Five Keys today provides education for in-custody and community education in high school curricula, vocational skills, life skills classes, and access to college and workforce programs. Programs are designed specifically for the incarcerated, recently incarcerated, or disenfranchised populations as they prepare to become contributing members of the community.

“Having the opportunity to earn my high school diploma is the chance to redeem myself with my parents, it has helped me to feel proud of myself, said Melendez. “It feels so good to have my family come together to celebrate one more accomplishment. Having the chance to get my education back, having the chance that not everything is lost, that when you fight for something you want there’s nothing that can stop you.”

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