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SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY JAIL STUDENTS EARN DIPLOMAS *SF Sheriff's Five Keys Charter School Holds Ceremony for Graduates as More In-Custody Classes Resume Post-Pandemic*

San Francisco, CA- More than a dozen incarcerated individuals received their high school diplomas today during a graduation ceremony for the Sheriff's Office's nationally acclaimed **Five Keys Charter School**. Assistant Sheriff Tanzanika Carter, SFSO Command staff, Five Keys instructors, as well as students and their families attended the event at County Jail #3 in San Bruno.

"These graduates are not just improving themselves, they are helping our community," said **San Francisco County Sheriff Paul Miyamoto**. "We know that when a person completes their high school education here, they have a more than a 50% likelihood of not returning to jail. That's measurable success."

More than 4,000 incarcerated individuals from San Francisco County Jail have graduated from Five Keys Charter School since its inception in 2003. The program is currently offered in 25 other county jails throughout the state, serving more than 30,000 Californians each year. Sixteen people received diplomas in SF County jail today, including Ronal Cruz Lopez.

"I feel a lot better about myself; I feel like I finally found my groove," said **Cruz Lopez**. "I know it's not the best circumstance, but I feel like I was really pushed to finally get it done. Now that I have this crossed off my bucket list, I feel relieved! This is for my parents, for supporting me and believing in me."

Education was central to the SFSO mission when County Jail #3 was built in 2005. The school is located in the heart of the jail, with the rest of the jail designed around it. Earlier this week, more classrooms in the CJ#3 Education Corridor opened, the most since the pandemic, when health mandates forced the closure of many in-person programs.

“These graduates chose not only to survive, but to thrive while incarcerated,” said **Terese Bravo**, Five Keys Principal at SF County Jail. “I’m proud that this graduating class remained focused, stayed the course, and found ways to persevere and earn their high school diplomas through it all.”

“I feel like I have done something productive in this environment that I am in,” said **Nyjil Jones**. “I am proud of myself. This journey was a task, but it was worth it.”

With six more classrooms now open, Five Keys was able to relaunch its **Keys to College Program**- a pathway for Five Keys Graduates to pursue post-secondary opportunities.

“Through the partnership with City College of San Francisco and Berkeley Underground Scholars, Keys to College is currently offering classes and college preparatory workshops to 96 men located in San Francisco County Jail #3,” said **Gale Rosbro, with the Five Keys College Team**. “In addition to high school graduates, classes are also offered to students currently enrolled in high school and English language learners.”

Five Keys was founded by **former San Francisco Mike Hennessey**, who established the original accredited charter high school for incarcerated persons, despite a lack of funding and support from politicians at the time, who argued that running a school was not the job of law enforcement. Hennessey helped shift the culture of the jails, transforming cells into classrooms, deputies into guidance counselors, and incarcerated persons into students.

Graduates each completed a full high school curriculum, not a GED program.

“My journey was long, but it got to the point where I had to do something good for myself under bad circumstances,” said **Cruz Lopez**. “I feel proud of myself, and I’m glad that I have something to look forward to now- continuing on to college.”

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