

How a Community Advisory Board secured millions for housing

An interview with Nicole Green, Forensic Social Worker, Office of the Public Defender, and Chair of the Contra Costa Community Advisory Board (CAB).

Each year, the state of California allocates over **\$2 billion dollars** into counties' criminal legal systems through AB 109.¹ This funding supports rehabilitative services and supervision for people convicted of lower-level crimes.

We know that permanent supportive housing helps prevent rearrest and homelessness, which many people experience after incarceration. Yet when Homebase reviewed the AB 109 budgets of every California county, we found that most don't fund housing beyond time-limited, sober living beds. In fact, most AB 109 money gets spent on law enforcement.

Thanks to community advocacy, Contra Costa County bucks this trend. In FY24-25, Contra Costa allocated about \$2.6 million from its AB 109 budget to housing options for the reentry population, including emergency shelter and transitional housing. They are spending an additional \$7.6 million of AB 109 funds on the County's Health, Housing, and Homeless Services Division (H3) to expand homeless services and housing options for people in reentry. These services will include dedicated rapid rehousing and a homeless outreach team for jail releases.

¹ In 2011, California prisons reached dangerous levels of overcrowding. The U.S. Supreme Court held in *Brown v. Plata* that California had violated the Eighth Amendment's protection against cruel and unusual punishment and directed the state to reduce its prison population.

In response, California quickly passed Assembly Bill (AB) 109, also known as Public Safety Realignment. AB 109 shifted responsibility for thousands of people convicted of non-serious, nonviolent, and non-sexual offenses from the state to local counties. For the past 15 years, the state has been providing funding to California counties to implement Realignment. In each county, the local Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) is responsible for spending the funding.

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Our team had the opportunity to present at the 2025 Housing California Conference with **Nicole Green, Chair of the Contra Costa Community Advisory Board (CAB)**. The CAB advises the County on how to spend AB 109 funds – and made a winning case for housing.

In an era of lean funding, the CAB's advocacy in Contra Costa shows how community-driven processes can make creative use of existing funding sources and shift resources from punitive systems to supportive ones.

Homebase Directing Analyst Shebani Rao recently chatted with Nicole for a behind-the-scenes look into how the CAB made their magic happen. Our interview has been edited for clarity and conciseness. Thank you, Nicole!

Shebani

How did you first get involved with the CAB?

Nicole

I initially got involved with the CAB because I was a program manager who managed AB 109 funds for [SHELTER, Inc.](#). I wanted to get a better understanding of the provider expectations and learn how to be more connected. From my lived experience, I really wanted to understand more about AB 109 because I didn't even know about it.

Shebani

Can you tell us about the purpose of the CAB?

Nicole

We like to call ourselves the watchdog of the money and the voice for the voiceless.

The CAB was established in 2012 to allow community members to be that voice for the voiceless. CCP [the Community Corrections Partnership] is responsible for AB 109 funding, and the CAB allows for community members to have access to information and give feedback on how funding should be allocated and what programs are needed. The CCP then brings recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

I know a lot of people may not love when we say that we're watchdogs of the money, but I really do believe that. What I've learned is that a lot of individuals whose voices need to be at the table are not there. We need to have eyes on what the higher ups are thinking about program-wise, because they're not boots on the ground.

Higher-ups need information from those who see this every day and live this every day to really understand how things are being done, how people are being affected, and how the money should be used.

Shebani

Who sits on the CAB?

Nicole

The CAB has 12 voting members and three alternates who serve for three-year terms. It can be anyone who lives or works in Contra Costa. The goal is to have expertise in areas like workforce development, behavioral health, reentry services, and more.

Currently, we have a lot of providers. This year, we wanted more folks with lived experience, either on the CAB or just coming to our meetings. We are working with our community partners and tabling at events to recruit more people.

The meetings are open to the public, either in person at the Probation Office, or you can join via Zoom. We also do recordings on YouTube. If people are interested in coming to our meetings, check out the [Contra Costa County agendas](#).

Shebani

How do you get selected to be part of the CAB?

Nicole

You fill out an application, and then you go through three interview and voting processes – with our Outreach and Community Engagement Subcommittee, the full CAB, and the CCP. It's a long process!

Membership is on a volunteer basis. I tell folks: if you're going to be a part of CAB, identify what your *why* is. It's going to be a lot of time. If you don't have the time right now, that is okay! You can still uplift your voice from the side and give us input.

Shebani

How did CAB's advocacy lead to the allocation of AB 109 funds to housing?

Nicole

Throughout the year, we meet with our district leaders, the Sheriff's Office, CCP, and others to get their perspective on the justice involved population's needs. We also do surveys of

Community Based Organizations (CBOs), people in jail, and the community. From that data, the Office of Reentry and Justice (ORJ) puts together information for us to identify gaps and needs, and then we make recommendations.

In 2022, we were going through the budget process with the CCP and realized there was a \$15 million balance that hadn't been allocated. We decided to take a chance. We looked at our data and put together a presentation about the areas that we felt had the most need - not just for that year, but looking back.

What keeps being the same need? We all know it's housing.

Employment is also always a big issue. We were able to identify adding post and pre-release services as well as behavioral health needs. We presented an idea of how we could utilize these funds if they gave us an opportunity.

And the CCP said yes.

From what we were told, that was the first time ever when they were like, "you know what? Let's go ahead and do that." I think it was because of how CAB presented it, all the work that we put in. We did our research, brought data to prove why these interventions were needed, and pointed out the gaps and barriers.

And then they gave us an assignment to come back with more information in a very short timeframe. We conducted work groups across the key areas we broke down – housing, employment, behavioral health, and pre- and post-release services. We had no idea how much work this was going to really take. We were just very excited.

In my opinion, there were too many silos with the justice involved population – everybody wasn't working together.

One of the biggest things that I wanted to do is remove the silos. I didn't just want to ask our CBOs for their data, but also others in the county that were doing the same thing. We came up with a list of questions that we asked everyone, like *if we gave you this amount of money, give us an example of what you would do*. And they all came with a plan.

Shebani

What did you do with all that information?

Nicole

After those work groups came the hard part, because a lot of us on CAB are community members and don't have finance backgrounds. But I was blessed to have people with certain skills. One of the people in CAB is a budget guru. We were able to take all the feedback from each workgroup, figure out how much money to allocate, and propose a pilot.

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For example, after our housing workshop, we took the feedback from housing providers and estimated how much money we wanted to allocate to build a program from scratch. And we took their recommendations on how the housing should be structured.

The next step was putting out Requests for Proposals (RFPs). A lot of that work did not fall on CAB anymore, but we were still able to be a part of the RFP process. ORJ asked us for our feedback on the programs and allowed us to volunteer to be part of the panels.

We asked to continue to be part of the conversation, because normally what happens is, once it's recommended, the CAB is removed. We didn't want that.

I appreciate that the CCP approved that for us. So anytime there's a meeting, a CAB member is allowed to be there. As Chair, it's usually always me [laughs].

Shebani

It seems like the research you did was important to securing funding for housing. Was there anything else you did that helped make this process a success?

Nicole

The CCP said that one of the main reasons that they said yes was because every time we came to a meeting, we had a full presentation, and they've never seen that before. To us, that was just our work, our advocacy, how we wanted to make a change.

The CCP said, "you guys take the time after work, on the weekends, you're at every meeting." They wanted to uplift what we've done and put the money towards where the gaps are.

Shebani

When disagreements arise within the CAB or between the CAB and the CCP, how do you approach it?

Nicole

It happens all the time. You need a strong leader to be able to negotiate those things. For the past two years, I've been learning politics - setting myself at these tables to understand how things work. We all want to advocate, but there is a way that we must advocate, and if we advocate in the wrong way, we won't get what we want.

I learned that decisions are already made before the meeting starts. I wanted to be in those rooms where conversations were being had before the meeting. I found a way to do that, and I would bring back the information I learned to the CAB to make sure they knew what was

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coming. I could prep them to see that we may not get exactly what we want, but at the end of the day, a win is a win.

You need to learn to be observant, because it will allow you to be in spaces that you're normally not supposed to be in, right? You learn by listening, and then you bring it back. You get more involved, and then people want you around more and want your feedback. I like the fact that leadership took the time to explain things to me, so then I could bring that back to the CAB.

Shebani

You're funding many housing options, but other counties often just use their AB 109 funds on sober living. What are some of the challenges with sober living?

Nicole

Sober living shouldn't be the end-all and be-all. First, we should get rid of the term "Sober Living Environment." We should either go back to calling it Transitional and/or Halfway Housing or just say "shared housing." The definition needs to be clearer to convey what these houses are.

Sober living houses need to go through a process and be certified, and the staff needs to be trained. There should be guidelines in place on what is required to open a house. They should also be restructured and gender responsive. When you go to a typical sober living house, you have people that are justice involved, have mental health issues, or are dealing with sobriety – all mixed. This should be a no. It's not going to work.

When someone gets released from jail or prison, the first place they go to is shared housing. And the issue with shared housing is that it's just like being incarcerated. You're sharing a room with someone else, and there are all these rules.

I feel passionate about this because I was homeless once, and I decided to sleep on someone's couch rather than going to a sober living environment. *I just got out of jail, and you want me to go live in a room with someone I don't know, in a house with people I don't know, to follow some rules?* That is just ridiculous. The whole thing needs to be reevaluated. That should not be the first thing someone gets when they get out.

Shebani

What advice would you give another community who wanted to start a CAB?

Nicole

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Get involved, get connected to your leaders, go to meetings. The knowledge that you have is truly important, but before you start advocating, really go and learn what's going on in your county and where the gaps are.

Look at how our CAB is structured and understand the time commitment that it takes to really have a successful CAB. Identify what your county may need when you're building your CAB. It may be different than ours. Then, build up your committee. You need a strong chair to lead your board.

As a chair, I cannot do this work myself. I always make sure that the board feels like they are part of the team. Make sure they all feel important. Figure out what special piece each member brings.

Shebani

Is there anything we didn't ask?

Nicole

I am a woman who was justice involved and homeless. What started me on my journey in this work is when I got released, I did every step they told me to, and it didn't work. It made me angry. I know what it felt like to go meet a Probation Officer, to be told, "you have to do A, B, and C" with no income. It's a mess – what the expectations are of you when you have nothing.

Ever since that day, I promised myself, *I am not what you see on paper*. Because I wasn't. And I'm going to be that success story. I'm going to figure this out for somebody else. Housing was number one for me, because I didn't know anything about any of these programs. Nobody ever told me.

My work in CAB comes from my passion and my love for this population. And to hopefully seek change and for people to view the population differently.

Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with us, Nicole! If you are interested in finding out more, please get in touch with Nicole [here](#). For additional information about AB 109 funding in Contra Costa, please visit the [AB 109 data dashboard](#).