



Abbie Traylor-Smith/For the S.F. Chronicle

Peaches Christ, center, at the London Justice 4 Heklina rally on Monday. The S.F. entertainer organized the protest as part of an ongoing effort to push the investigation forward into the drag legend's 2023 death.

'Still mourning' without answers

S.F., London rallies demand justice in probe of drag queen's death

By Anna Bauman and Tony Bravo

Punk rock music pulsed through a packed room on Monday night at The Stud. Adriana Roberts flipped her long red hair onstage and, to cheers from the crowd, peeled off a shiny silver top to reveal a message written with glow-in-the-dark body paint: "Justice 4 Trans Lives + Heklina."

Roberts' performance was part of tandem events in San Francisco and London organized and attended by friends and fans of Heklina, a legendary drag queen and San Francisco icon who died in April 2023 while on tour in London. The group raised concerns about the London Metropolitan Police investigation into her death, which they say remains ongoing and inconclusive.

"We miss her dearly. I would not have my career without her," Robert said. "Two years later, we're still mourning because we don't have answers."

The first gathering of the day took place in England, where San Francisco drag queen Peaches Christ led about 100 pro-



Gabrielle Lurie/S.F. Chronicle

Rex Wheeler, center, better known as drag star Lady Camden from RuPaul's Drag Race, in the Oasis dressing room as people prepare to commemorate Heklina.

testers on a march through central London to call out the Metropolitan Police for what they allege is "homophobic bias" in the ongoing investigation into Heklina's death.

In London, the crowd gathered near the famed Big Ben clock tower at Westminster Palace, holding signs that read "Queer Safety Over Police Power," "We Deserve Justice Not

Discrimination" and "End Met Police Homophobia Now!" as they walked along the Thames River Embankment to the London Metropolitan Police Headquarters.

Speakers at the rally included Peaches Christ, Scissor Sisters singer Ana Matronic, LGBTQ activist Peter Tatchell, and London drag performers Cheddar Gorgeous and

Crystal.

"We feel your sisterly love here in London and we super appreciate it," Peaches Christ told the crowd. "This sunshine, this weather today, I feel Heklina is with us... and she will be in San Francisco later today."

In San Francisco, people sipped from plastic cups and chatted in **Heklina continues on A11**

U.S. health services office in S.F. to shut

Closure comes amid mass layoffs at federal agencies under Trump

By Shira Stein

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Health and Human Services Department's San Francisco regional office will be shuttered this spring amid a broad culling of jobs at federal health agencies.

The office, located in the Speaker Nancy Pelosi Federal Building, consists of 318 staff who manage Medicare, Medicaid, health services for Native Americans and HIV/AIDS programs for Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, six American territories and nearly 160 federally recognized tribes.

"This shortsighted office closure would lead to critical service slowdowns for San Franciscans to get the resources they need and detrimental impacts to our public health response capabilities — all in the name of so-called 'government efficiency,'" Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi said in a statement confirming the move.

"Make no mistake: the reported plans to restructure HHS and close the San Francisco regional office would directly harm our most vulnerable communities and make America sicker," Pelosi said.

The closure of the regional office became public as nearly one-eighth of the enormous, 82,000-employee department received notices of dismissal Tuesday morning. Another one-eighth of the staff took early retirement and voluntary **HHS continues on A11**

City push to add treatment beds yields little yet

By Maggie Angst

More than a year ago, San Francisco passed a law designed to boost the number of beds for those in the throes of mental illness and addiction, with then-Mayor London Breed saying at the time that the city "can't allow delays and bureaucracy to get in the way of getting people help."

But despite changes to streamline the system, the city has not added any treatment beds.

The law, unanimously approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in February 2024, waived the city's competitive bidding process with the goal of bringing new treatment beds online faster and reducing wait times for clients. The Breed administration said that the city was often forced to compete with other Bay Area agencies for a limited number of privately owned and non-profit-run beds in the region and that the city's onerous bidding process put it at a disadvantage.

The Department of Public Health said that although it has not yet added any treatment beds since the law took effect, it has helped the city "ensure continuity of existing beds for contracts that were set to expire." The agency plans to leverage the law to add approximately 135 treatment and **Treatment continues on A10**

State eyes \$239M San Quentin makeover

By Nora Mishanec

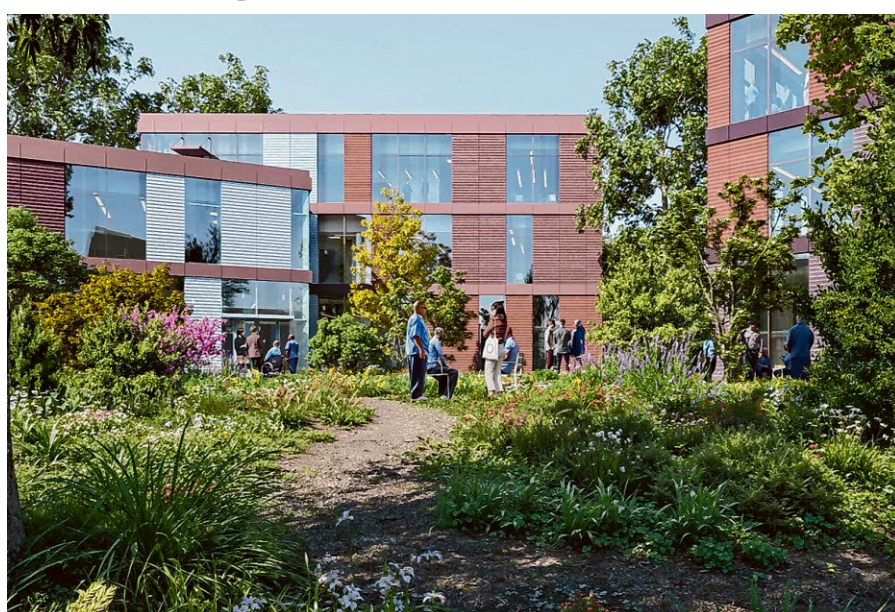
California officials have envisioned a host of sweeping changes for San Quentin State Prison as they attempt to remake the facility into a Scandinavian-style rehabilitation center complete with a farmers market, a podcast production studio and a self-service grocery store.

The renovations are expected to cost California taxpayers \$239 million, according to state officials. Construction was on track to finish in January 2026, officials said, with the first incarcerated people set to begin using the revamped facility within months of

completion early next year.

The overhaul of what Gov. Gavin Newsom's office has called California's "most notorious prison" was set in motion shortly after Newsom was elected in 2018. He declared a moratorium on executions, began dismantling Death Row and ordered officials to begin the slow process of transferring San Quentin prisoners to other state facilities. In 2023, he announced plans to turn the entire prison into a Nordic-style center for preparing incarcerated people to reenter life outside prison.

The Newsom administration **Prison continues on A10**



Courtesy of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

A rendering shows what San Quentin State Prison could look like after a \$239 million renovation that will make sweeping changes to the facility.