

San Francisco Bay Area Corruption Thrives Now More Than Ever

A new political soap opera is underway in California. And the backstory offers yet another case study of why voters across the country [lost faith last November](#) in the ability of left-leaning officials to make good on promises of sound governance and progressive reform.

On March 4, [a special election in San Mateo County](#) will ask voters to grant their Board of Supervisors the power to oust elected Sheriff Christina Corpus two years into her first term — an unusual but speedier mechanism for removal than a traditional recall.

Corpus, a longtime sheriff's office employee, beat incumbent Carlos Bolanos in 2022 — becoming [one of California's first Latina sheriffs](#).

Corpus ran on a platform of reform after Bolanos faced numerous allegations of favoritism — including [prioritizing his donors for concealed weapons carry permits](#) and [improperly sending deputies](#) to raid the garage of a Batmobile manufacturer in Indiana after one of Bolanos' friends complained he hadn't received the car he ordered. In 2007, as undersheriff, Bolanos and then-Sheriff Greg Munks were [detained in a Las Vegas brothel raid](#).

Corpus promised to eradicate this “good ole boy” mentality and implement ambitious criminal justice reforms, including community policing, improved behavioral health treatment for inmates and expanded services in low-income areas — all laudable goals.

But these reforms have been overshadowed by Corpus' own web of controversies, which have spawned a confusing tangle of allegations, investigations and lawsuits.

Many center on Victor Aenlle, an associate real estate broker and reserve deputy sheriff whom Corpus has successfully and unsuccessfully attempted to name to various high-paid positions within her administration.

In November, retired Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge LaDoris Cordell [released a 400-page report](#) that found Corpus and Aenlle were in an “intimate relationship” that led Corpus to “relinquish control” of the office to Aenlle, who “exercises wide-ranging and sometimes abusive authority over both civilian and sworn employees.”

According to Cordell’s report, county officials terminated Aenlle’s contract to work on Corpus’ transition team [after learning they took a trip to Hawaii together](#). But after Corpus took office, she rehired Aenlle as a contractor and then created an “executive director of administration” position, which came with a \$247,000 salary. The job wasn’t publicized, and Aenlle was the sole applicant. Corpus later sought to bump Aenlle’s pay several times, but county officials denied the requests.

Cordell determined that Corpus violated conflict-of-interest policies by hiring Aenlle, having him report directly to her and repeatedly seeking pay increases for him, that Corpus and Aenlle engaged in “retaliation and intimidation,” that Aenlle didn’t meet the duty requirements to be a reserve deputy and that Corpus had used racial and homophobic slurs in the workplace.

The day after receiving the report, [the San Mateo Board of Supervisors called for Corpus’ resignation](#) and the elimination of Aenlle’s role. Corpus refused to step down, calling the judge’s investigation “politically motivated and one-sided.” She then doubled down on Aenlle, announcing that she was promoting him to assistant sheriff — which ultimately didn’t advance.

Corpus and Aenlle deny a romantic relationship and have cited errors with Cordell's report and taken issue with its methodology.

What is indisputable is that Corpus has repeatedly stuck her neck out for Aenlle — to the detriment of her office and to the essential criminal justice reforms she says she's trying to implement.

In an interview with the editorial board, Aenlle said he has "more qualifications than most people in the department" and said he deserved the pay bumps, which were standard for any employee taking on extra work.

But our interview only raised more questions about why Corpus keeps going to bat for Aenlle, who was prone to ramble in argumentative threads that were difficult to follow. He described a sheriff's office riddled with people with "evil hearts" and a culture of horrific abuse, including molesting minors and raping female inmates. Yet he didn't offer any evidence to back up these claims.

In a development reminiscent of the [scandal surrounding former Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao](#), the Mercury News reported last week that [the FBI asked San Mateo County officials](#) for a copy of the lease for a Redwood City building the sheriff's office has rented since September 2023 — a deal Aenlle helped oversee as Corpus' chief of staff.

In an interview, Corpus told the editorial board that she intended to turn the building into a substation and child care center for sheriff's office employees, many of whom commute long distances. But the Mercury News found that amid infighting between the county and the sheriff's office, the building remains empty — even as taxpayers continue to cough up \$36,000 in monthly rent.

As an independently elected official, Corpus said, she has the right to decide who works for her.

“Every other sheriff has been allowed to pick their team,” she said. “Why am I held to a different standard?”

Corpus comes across as knowledgeable and capable. But what she can't seem to acknowledge is that her steadfast allegiance to Aenlle is a distraction from her duties to the public and her proposed reforms.

Jail conditions, for example, remain concerning. Last year, mental health advocates [called for an independent review of deaths](#) in San Mateo County Jail after a string of five inmate deaths under Corpus' watch.

It's also strained her relationship with rank-and-file workers. The Deputy Sheriff's Association, the union representing deputies, accused Aenlle of creating a toxic workplace environment, clashed with Corpus and Aenlle over overtime policies and [filed unfair labor practices against the sheriff's office](#). In November, the sheriff's office arrested Carlos Tapia, the union's president and a vocal critic of Corpus and Aenlle, on charges of felony timecard fraud. The San Mateo County District Attorney's Office [later found](#) there was no reason to suspect Tapia had violated the law and that he shouldn't have been arrested.

Former sheriff's office Capt. Brian Philip then [filed a lawsuit](#) against San Mateo County, alleging, among other things, that he faced retaliation for refusing to carry out Corpus and Aenlle's "illegal" orders, including to arrest Tapia. (Corpus said she couldn't discuss Tapia's arrest due to a pending investigation, but said there "was no retaliation.") The assistant sheriff who signed a probable cause declaration to arrest Tapia [also resigned](#).

Corpus, meanwhile, [filed her own \\$10 million claim against the county](#), alleging discrimination, harassment and defamation based on her gender and race.

When we asked, Corpus did not rule out bringing Aenlle back to play a central role in her administration should she survive the special election.

It's all yet another example of how reform and good governance in our state too often end up being little more than bumper stickers — as politicians continue to put their personal interests above the public good.