

INSPECTION OF COUNTY PRISONS, JAILS AND ALLIED AGENCIES

SUMMARY

California Penal Code 919 subsection (b) provides: "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." The 2010-2011 Grand Jury fulfilled this mandated responsibility by inspecting 13 facilities in San Luis Obispo County. Inspections included the California Men's Colony (CMC), County detention facilities for men and women, city police department jails and lockups, court holding cells, and the juvenile detention center.

The County Women's Jail and the CMC Medical/Health Facility caused concern. The jail is overcrowded and its facilities are unable to accommodate total bedding requirements. The CMC Medical/Health facility is antiquated and difficult for staff to manage. Fortunately, both facilities have received funding for upgrades and improvements over the next three years.

Grand Jury inspections also identified some of the County programs for "at risk" youth. In particular, the County's Drug and Alcohol Services Division and Probation Departments coordinate with several prevention, intervention, and deterrent programs for youth. Descriptions of some of these education and prevention programs are provided in the 2010-2011 Grand Jury Report entitled, "**Juvenile Junction: Alcohol and Drug Prevention and Treatment Programs in San Luis Obispo County.**" The Grand Jury is concerned that several of these programs are impacted by current State and County budget difficulties and their continued financial support is at risk.

Despite the current budget restraints and staffing limitations, it is the Grand Jury's opinion that facilities inspected appeared to be generally well managed.

INTRODUCTION

Inspections conducted at each location by teams of no fewer than two Grand Jury members are identified and discussed below. For purposes of this report, detention facilities are separated into four categories:

1. California Men's Colony (CMC)
2. County Sheriff's Department
3. Juvenile Justice System
4. Municipal police departments (seven total)

Staff at all inspected locations provided an overview of the facility operation and responded to questions from the Grand Jury about their operations.

NARRATIVE

California Men's Colony (CMC)

Overview

CMC houses about 6,500 inmates at a facility spanning 356 acres. CMC is divided into two units, East and West. Opened in 1961, the 'East Side' is a level III (medium security) facility that is sub-divided into four quadrangular program yards. Each quad has its own dining room, triage unit, athletic field, and two three-story housing units. When the Grand Jury visited, there were approximately 3,750 inmates on the East Side. Older cells are roughly 56 square feet and are the smallest of all California Department of Corrections facilities. A typical cell may accommodate two inmates. The 'West Side,' opened in 1954, is a level I/II facility and houses about 2,750 inmates. It is divided into four program yards: each yard houses general population minimum security risk inmates in dormitories, with approximately 80 inmates per dormitory. One yard contains a Level I (minimum security risk inmates) fire camp and minimum support facility. The West Side works extensively with the County and other governmental entities to provide manpower for conservation and community service work. The East Side and West Side

prison grounds were clean and orderly.

Prison Industries

CMC staff provided the Grand Jury an overview and tour of the Prison Industry Authority (PIA), ongoing education/vocational programs, medical/health facility, substance abuse programs, and the disciplinary hearing process.

There are seven PIA industries in operation at CMC; the program is the largest and most diverse in the state corrections system. About 600 inmates (approximately 10% of the prison population) work at jobs in the knitting mill, fabric products, shoe factory, print plant, laundry, warehouse distribution, and maintenance and repair industries. These industries provide products and services to CMC and other state prison facilities. For example, the shoe factory annually produces 88,000 pairs of boots for inmates and fire camp residents. The boots are high quality and are produced at a cost of approximately \$27.50 per pair. Each plant has a civilian plant superintendent (or manager). The PIA Director has been at the prison for 30+ years. He takes pride in the operation of each industry plant and appears to have the respect of the inmates.

Inmate Education

CMC offers educational opportunities for inmates. Several academic and vocational training programs are offered, but none was discussed in detail with Grand Jury members. Instructors and teachers' assistants address all learning levels within the classrooms to which they are assigned. The Grand Jury was unable to observe classroom activities during its inspection visit due to dense fog and limited visibility. In such conditions, prison policy requires lockdown mode.

In the academic program, approximately 1,000 students receive three hours of instruction per week. The curriculum focuses on reading, writing, and arithmetic, with the goal of inmates attaining a GED. The average reading level is around eighth grade. Inmates with high school diplomas or GED equivalent may enroll in college correspondence courses through a program affiliated with Coastline Community College. The CMC Education Department provides

resources and tutoring for the inmates. Officials noted there have been considerable reductions in programs and educational opportunities due to state budget constraints.

Vocational programs at CMC include automotive repair, machine and welding, electronics, office services and technology, auto body, paint, carpentry, and building maintenance. Several vocational programs are affiliated with trade unions or offer a professional certification program. If CMC inmates receive certifications and/or licenses, and participate in apprenticeships, they add relevance and marketability to the skills acquired in prison. The Grand Jury discussed the reality of a qualified candidate achieving success in a difficult job market. The inmate may gain certification through the vocational programs offered at CMC but will compete for employment with equally qualified candidates without criminal records. Those limited opportunities are dependent upon coordination with the business community and its confidence in supporting rehabilitation programs for individuals after incarceration.

Medical/Health

The Grand Jury conducted two visits to the Medical/Health Department. The initial inspection covered services and accommodations provided for inmate medical, dental, and psychiatric needs. A follow-up inspection reviewed inmate medical complaints, fire and safety inspections, staffing levels, associated training, and results of the last California Department of Public Health inspection.

The Grand Jury was initially concerned with the high number of inmate medical complaints. However, further inquiry revealed that each inmate can submit complaints to three levels of adjudication and in the majority of cases does so. The rate of actual new complaints at CMC is among the lowest of the 33 California prison medical facilities. Further samplings of complaints indicated that, despite the volume, complaints are reviewed carefully and dealt with professionally and with compassion.

The CMC Medical/Health facility is antiquated and difficult for staff to manage. Medical records currently are filed as hard copies and take up much of the facility's storage area. This results in congestion in working areas that have become crowded with equipment necessary for

patient care. Fortunately, groundbreaking has started on a new medical facility that will better accommodate inmate health needs.

Substance Abuse Programs

A presentation on Substance Abuse Programs available to inmates was given during the Grand Jury tour. In January 2010, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) phased in a new three-month treatment model at nine prisons, including CMC. This streamlined model focuses on reducing recidivism and reaching as many offenders as possible. The services provided include substance abuse treatment recovery services, social cognitive and behavioral counseling, life skills training, health-related education, and relapse prevention. Inmates receive services near the end of their confinement and during their parole phase, and are encouraged to complete community treatment upon release. Upon completion of this program, inmates are encouraged to reside in a dedicated dormitory to promote further aftercare. The CMC program has successfully graduated approximately 600 program participants. Of these graduates, about 70% have transitioned to aftercare.

Some Grand Jury members witnessed several disciplinary hearings for inmates who violated prison rules. A disciplinary offense is categorized as “serious” or “administrative” and CMC staff conducts the hearings. The hearings are typically brief (less than 10 minutes); each inmate is presented with a description of the charges, the context of an ongoing investigation, an opportunity for the inmate to provide comment and an anticipated time frame for completion of the investigation. Cases observed involved possession of cell phones or money, or assault on others. The inmates remain in Administrative Segregation until the case investigation is completed. The inmates were treated with dignity and respect throughout the process.

General Observations:

- CMC employs approximately 1,950 inmate custody and non-custody support staff.
- Some correctional officers spend their entire 8-hour shifts at their watch station. There is no rotation. The guards "bid" for these positions and prefer this stationary plan.
- In the main yard, inmates may participate in recreational activities. Tennis and handball

courts are on uneven dirt surfaces.

- In the main outdoor yard where inmates exercise, inmates who are always segregated from the general population exercise in secured “cages” on concrete pads.
- Medical, dental, and psychological accommodations for inmates are limited. Many inmates are aging and typically require more medical and mental treatment resources.

Sheriff’s Department

Overview

The Grand Jury visited the Sheriff’s Department after the new sheriff was sworn into office in January. The Sheriff and his management team presented an overview and discussed department challenges. These challenges include staffing, geographical coverage, jail facilities, and budget constraints. The Grand Jury inspected the Men’s Jail, the Women’s Jail and the County Courthouse holding cells, and visited the County crime lab.

Jail Facilities

The Men’s Jail has a total capacity of 518; there were 555 inmates incarcerated on the day of the Grand Jury visit. Approximately 60% of the inmate population is unsentenced. The number of inmates arrested and brought to jail on felony charges is about three times higher than the number brought to jail on misdemeanor charges. The number of inmates with felony convictions is almost equal to the number with misdemeanor convictions.

Upon arrival, inmates are interviewed and a housing decision is made. An inmate classification is determined, which is dependent upon current charges, criminal history, criminal sophistication, disciplinary problems, and medical/mental health concerns. Housing is a combination of dormitory and single/multi-inmate cell configurations. A medical dispensary is staffed 24 hours a day by registered nurses with additional support from Sierra Vista Hospital (as necessary). Services for inmates include medical, dental, and detoxification treatment by physicians and dentists on a limited basis. Three full time staff counselors support inmates with mental health issues. Inmates have educational opportunities to earn a GED and learn life skills, such as building relationships, coping with stress, teaching their children, and setting and

prioritizing goals.

The Honor Farm is primarily a men's facility for minimum security risk inmates. They are housed in two 80-bed dormitories. Vocational and workplace programs are available with the goal of teaching basic occupational and workplace readiness skills. The Honor Farm, which includes a vegetable farm, a laundry, and a kitchen (serving 1,700 meals per day provides these services to the inmate population. There is a limited number of local businesses that participate in job opportunities for Honor Farm inmates after release.

The Women's Jail has a 43-bed capacity. It housed 82 inmates on the day of the Grand Jury's visit. There are two dormitories; one houses Honor Farm women inmates assigned jobs (typically janitorial). Both dormitories were at approximately double capacity. The Women's Jail Expansion Project has received approval from the Board of Supervisors and will be completed in approximately three years. The new 196-bed facility will address overcrowding conditions at the existing jail and will include adequate restrooms, counseling rooms/classrooms, and ADA-compliant accommodations. A new medical facility will be added once the new jail is completed.

Court House Holding Cells

The County Courthouse holding cells segregate men and women inmates in custody while awaiting a courtroom appearance. Correctional officers bring 23-77 inmates to court each day. Individuals in custody wear ankle and waist chains and are dressed in jumpsuits color coded to identify more easily the required escort level. There are also single cells for people whom the judge orders into custody from the courtroom. Each person in custody is served lunch and, when necessary, is escorted for restroom breaks. All areas observed were clean and orderly, but County Courthouse holding facilities do not have restrooms in close proximity for the correctional officers.

County Crime Lab

A tour of the County Crime Lab provided an overview of services available. The staff consists

of four forensic specialists who retrieve evidence in the field and analyze it using a variety of tools and specialized equipment. A certified clinical toxicologist operates the analytical lab. Some funding comes from federal grants which are used to supplement or replace old equipment. The lab collects samples but does not perform any DNA analysis. Such work requires special equipment which necessitates sending samples elsewhere for rapid analysis.

Juvenile Justice System and Probation

The Grand Jury looked into juvenile delinquency programs in the County. The Probation Department oversees services dealing with prevention, intervention, supervision, and incarceration of juveniles. Youthful offenders who come through the juvenile court system are placed in the custody of the Probation Department. Typical offenses tend to involve drug or alcohol abuse, gang activity, truancy, and aggressive or violent behavior. The Juvenile Justice System division supervises approximately 500 minors requiring court-ordered intervention and rehabilitation. Levels of probation supervision range from court mandated or voluntary programs to declaring the minor a ward of the court.

Juvenile Hall

The Chief Probation Officer and staff conducted a tour of the Juvenile Hall for the Grand Jury. This facility has a capacity of 45 and at the time of the Grand Jury visit, 34 individuals were in custody. Law enforcement or deputy probation officers bring arrested minors to the facility. Depending upon charges or the individual's 'home' environment, a determination is made whether or not the individual should be detained pending a hearing before Juvenile Court. Upon entry, each minor is assessed for medical condition, potential gang affiliation, and emotional state. An individual may reside at Juvenile Hall for as little as one day or much longer. The hearing is conducted by a judge at the facility and disposition may result in assignment to home detention, placement in foster care or detainment at Juvenile Hall.

For juveniles detained, emphasis is placed on education under a Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited program, which is administered by the County Office of Education. The teaching staff consists of two full time teachers, a resource teacher, and three

full time instructional assistants. The staff consults with local schools to assess the individual assignments according to grade level, academic ability, and requirements for a high school graduation, GED or other equivalent.

Probation Department

The Probation Department works in conjunction with the county's Drug and Alcohol Services Division and utilizes a number of treatment and prevention program options for "at risk" youth. No single program works for all situations because there is a multitude of cultural and social issues to address. The Grand Jury observed several noteworthy youth programs during inspections, presentations, and tours of County facilities and services. The 2010-2011 Grand Jury report entitled "**Juvenile Junction: Alcohol and Drug Prevention and Treatment Programs in San Luis Obispo County**" describes some of them.

Municipal Police Departments

The Grand Jury inspected holding cells in the following cities:

Atascadero

Morro Bay

Paso Robles

San Luis Obispo

Arroyo Grande

Grover Beach

Pismo Beach

Each municipal facility has a secure area (sallyport) to allow the transfer of an individual from the police vehicle to the booking area. Each municipality has a minimum of two holding cells. All facilities use video surveillance during the fingerprint and search process and when an individual is locked in a holding cell. Typical detention in holding cells is less than four hours, with a timeframe established by local policy. Arrested individuals are often transported directly to County Jail for processing. The Grand Jury also observed that processing rooms, holding cells and general office areas were, for the most part, clean and managed in a satisfactory manner.

Evidence property rooms and dispatch centers were observed and appeared in order.

General Observations

- Every police department and sheriff's patrol station participates in the County's Operation Medicine Cabinet program. The program identifies the hazards of inappropriate disposal of unwanted household medications and identifies the location of a sealed "drop off" cabinet for citizens to dispose of expired prescription medications.
- All police agencies have community volunteer programs.
- Arroyo Grande and Morro Bay have an Explorer Program available to boys and girls 14-18 years of age. The programs are under the direction of the Boy Scouts.
- Grover Beach utilizes new computer technology (SmartBoard) for briefings and staff training.
- Pismo Beach employs a "My Cop" program, which establishes zones and a contact for citizens' communications and partnership in the community.
- Arroyo Grande has a school resource officer who is based at Arroyo Grande High School and Paulding Middle School.
- Arroyo Grande, Pismo Beach, Paso Robles, and Atascadero have K-9 units. Other cities may summon K-9 assistance from neighboring jurisdictions, as needed.

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury commends the management and staff at detention facilities visited in the County. Due to significant and anticipated budgetary cutbacks, all prisons and jail facilities and departments are experiencing challenges to maintain programs, services, and adequate staffing levels. These reductions are of particular concern where efforts to thwart anti-social, violent and criminal behavior are in jeopardy. The Grand Jury recognizes that not all inmates can be rehabilitated, but early intervention, school education and parenting programs can influence the direction young people and "at risk" youth take. The alternative to not funding viable youth programs is recidivism and significantly higher costs to taxpayers for incarceration in our local

and state adult detention centers. The Grand Jury is concerned that society continues to “feed the problem” rather than “break the cycle,” resulting in higher costs, social outcasts and more complex issues to face.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

No responses are required.