

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

El Dorado County Jail, South Lake Tahoe

Reason for the Report

California Penal Code authorizes and directs Grand Juries to inspect and report annually on operations of all public prisons located within the boundaries of each county.

Scope of the Investigation

Members of the Grand Jury made a comprehensive inspection of the South Lake Tahoe Jail facility on September 20, 2002:

- Jury Members were briefed on Jail operations by the Jail Commander;
- The Jail commander conducted a comprehensive tour of the facilities;
- Staffing levels were discussed and explained;
- Recommendations of previous Grand Juries were discussed;
- Implementation of the recommendations was explained to and reviewed by the inspecting members;
- Plans and location for the new Juvenile Hall to be constructed next to the Jail were reviewed and discussed;
- Grand Jury Reports for 2000/01 and 2001/02 were reviewed.

Background

The South Lake Tahoe Jail premises appear to be well maintained and exceptionally clean. Renovation/construction is underway for a second sobering cell. Although plans had been made for a new juvenile hall to attach to the jail, current plans are for the premises to be adjacent and separate.

The staff appears well groomed and cooperative. Medical Staff, which is provided through contract, is available 24 hours and appears to be adequate. Dental services currently are obtained by transporting prisoners from South Lake Tahoe to Placerville Jail. However, dental services are available locally, which may be more cost effective.

Correctional officers are scheduled for 12-hour shifts three days one week and four days the next week (3/4). In addition, they routinely work additional overtime hours. The use of overtime to supplement staffing needs is a common practice raising a concern of safety and effectiveness. Since the inspection, the new Sheriff has modified and improved the work schedules.

The design and location of the ramp for the disabled which leads into the public area poses a safety hazard to the users and a potential liability to the County. During certain weather conditions the ramp must be closed. Since 1998, \$31,860 has been appropriated from the Criminal Justice Trust Fund for the ramp for the disabled as evidenced on the County of El Dorado Proposed Budget and

Workplan (General Services, Carry-over Facility Projects, 98-21 South Lake Tahoe Sheriff Handicap Ramp). The County has been aware of the problem with the ramp and considered possible solutions, however, it has failed to take action to correct the problem.

Security in the hallway between the jail and the Court Building needs to be improved. The hallway does not have adequate camera surveillance. The hallway is accessible from outside by key. Numerous County employees have access to the area.

Findings

F1. Prisoners are transported from South Lake Tahoe to Placerville for dental services.

Response to F1: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F2. The correctional officers routinely work 12 hour shifts with substantial additional overtime.

Response to F2: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. Correctional officers were working 12-hour shifts due to the existence of position vacancies at the time of the Committee's inspection. They have since returned to a 9/80 schedule because vacant positions were filled.

F3. Although \$31,860 was appropriated from the Criminal Justice Trust Fund in 1998 and included in the County of El Dorado Proposed Budget and Workplan (General Services Carryover Facility Projects, 98-21 South Lake Tahoe Sheriff Handicap Ramp) necessary improvements to the ramp for the disabled entrance have not been made resulting in continued safety hazard to users and potential liability to the County.

Response to F3: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F4. Current camera surveillance in the hallway between the jail and Court Building is not adequate.

Response to F4: The respondent disagrees with the finding. There is a distance of approximately 30 feet in the hallway that is not observable by the surveillance camera. Both the entry and exit to this hallway are observable on camera. Prisoners or inmates moving into, through, and beyond this area are under physical restraints at all times and are escorted by corrections staff who provide constant visible monitoring.

Recommendations

R1. Local dental services should be utilized if appropriate.

Response to R1: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The County has a multi-year contract for medical services, including dental services, that requires all dental services to be provided in Placerville as that is the most cost-effective way of delivering the service. Prisoners are transported back and forth as part of the normal biweekly transfer of inmates between the Tahoe and Placerville facilities. Utilization of local dental services increases the need for inmates to be transported, increases the opportunity for escape and requires dentists to be willing to schedule inmate visits during off hours – something they have historically not been willing to do except in an emergency

- R2. Staffing should be adequate to minimize the need for overtime.

Response to R2: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable. The Board of Supervisors has authorized adequate staffing based on a plan approved by the California Department of Corrections. For a variety of reasons, the Sheriff's Office has been unable to keep all those positions filled, resulting in the periodic need for overtime and/or 12-hour shifts. While the department makes every effort to recruit and hire jail staff, vacancies are a reality and overtime and shift adjustments will be an ongoing cost of doing business.

- R3. The ramp for the disabled should immediately be improved to meet safety conditions and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Response to R3: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. The existing ramp is in a location that receives large deposits of snow from the jail roof area. In an attempt to resolve this condition, together with addressing other needed repairs, a design was prepared to relocate the ramp to the south end of the covered porch area. This route will not only alleviate the excessive snow loading but will also reduce the grades along the ramp. The design of the new ramp is now complete. The General Services Department is currently soliciting bids for construction in conjunction with completing agency review (TRPA). Construction of the new ramp is scheduled for completion prior to October 15, 2003.

- R4. Camera surveillance in the hallway between the jail and Court Building should be properly and adequately upgraded.

Response to R4: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. There is one camera in the hallway and it is monitored whenever prisoners are in the corridor. While moving through the corridor, inmates are dressed in orange and restrained in waist chains and leg shackles, or dressed in regular clothes with a restraining leg brace and handcuffs. Uniformed deputy sheriffs escort prisoners and the number of escorts is determined by the number of inmates being moved and the assessed risk presented by the particular group or individual. The addition of a second camera to cover the thirty feet that is currently "blind" would not result in any increase to security.

Responses Required for Findings

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| F1 – F4 | El Dorado County Sheriff
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors |
| F3 | El Dorado County Department of General Services |

Responses Required for Recommendations

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| R1 – R4 | El Dorado County Sheriff
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors |
| R3 | El Dorado County Department of General Services |