

EL DORADO COUNTY COURT SECURITY

GJ05-032

Reason for the Report

The Grand Jury received a citizen complaint regarding the security provided for the Superior Courts in El Dorado County. Upon investigation, the Grand Jury believes that the security needs to be improved. In addition, budgetary accounting from the County for the security provided is not detailed and does not fully substantiate payment requests.

Scope of the Investigation

During jury year 2005-2006, members of the Grand Jury made visits to all the court facilities in El Dorado County.

People Interviewed:

- El Dorado County Sheriff
- Various Sheriff Department Employees
- Sheriff Sergeant In Charge Of Court Security
- Superior Court Executive Officer
- Various Superior Court Employees

Documents Reviewed:

- 2001-2002 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Court and Sheriff
- Draft of 2006-2007 MOU

Buildings Inspected:

- 2850 Fairlane Court, Bldg. C, Placerville
- 495 Main Street, Placerville
- 1354 Johnson Blvd., South Lake Tahoe
- 3321 Cameron Park Dr., Cameron Park

Background

The employees of the Superior Courts of El Dorado County are State employees. Many of the court's support services are provided by El Dorado County. Court security is provided by the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department. The court buildings are owned by El Dorado County, although they are to be turned over to the State in the future. Security is contractually documented in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Court and the Sheriff. While the most recent MOU expired in 2002, service has continued with all requirements and pricing handled without a contract. A new MOU is being developed for FY 2006/2007. This MOU draft specifies a fixed amount to be paid by the court.

Department 7 is located downstairs in County Building C and has a metal detector, but the detector is only functional while court is in session. The unscreened access beyond the metal detector is still accessible when court is closed. A weapon could be hidden in this area while court is closed and then retrieved later while court is in session.

Department 7 has two small holding areas, one each for men and women. These areas are often loaded beyond their capacity.

Department 8 is located on the ground floor of County Building C and has no metal detector for screening court entry. Department 8 is not a criminal court, but does have family court and traffic court hearings, both potentially volatile situations.

The Court and the Sheriff's Department both wish to improve security in Departments 7 and 8. This would require relocating the metal detection unit upstairs to service both courts. It would also require limiting downstairs access near Department 7 to prevent off-hour access. These efforts have been rebuffed by the county because it would be a hindrance to other county departments and/or citizens who do business in building C.

Departments 3, 4, 11, and 12 are co-located in South Lake Tahoe. Departments 3 and 4 are criminal courts, without a holding cell. Prisoners enter through employee hallways and often must remain in public or employee hallways (albeit with a Sheriff) until called to court.

Facts

1. MOU for court security expired 2002
2. 2006/2007 MOU calls for fixed dollar amount to be paid
3. Departments 7 and 8 are in County Building C, which was never built to be a court
4. Holding area in Department 7 is often over-crowded
5. Department 8 has no metal screening
6. Courts in South Lake Tahoe do not have a holding area

Findings/Recommendations

1F. Finding: Memorandum of Understanding for court security specifies a fixed dollar amount for the year with some provision for changes.

1R. Recommendation: All payment requests from the Sheriff for court security should be based on the actual hours the Sheriff spent on court security. Time keeping reports should be provided detailing all hours and other expenditures.

2F. Finding: Both the Sheriff and Court management agree that security for Departments 7 and 8 needs to be improved. Failure to do so exposes the Court employees and Court clients to unnecessary risk.

2R. Recommendation: Immediately relocate the metal detector in Building C to provide screening of both Departments 7 and 8. Install gates to close off court areas when in recess.

3F. Finding: South Lake Tahoe does not have a holding cell.

3R. Recommendation: Provide a holding cell in South Lake Tahoe court.

4F. Finding: The west slope courts are located in logistically diverse locations, in buildings that are not suited for the issues that a 21st century court must face.

4R. Recommendation: Aggressively pursue consolidating the west slope courts into a new, single facility, co-located with the county jail. Identify County and State funding required to move forward quickly.

A response is required by the Board of Supervisors within ninety (90) days. See Table of Contents, “*Notice to Respondents.*”