

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2013-2014

EL DORADO COUNTY JAILS INSPECTIONS

Case Number GJ-13-02

REASON FOR REPORT

Each year, the grand jury is mandated by California Penal Code §919(b) to “inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the county.”

BACKGROUND

The South Lake Tahoe and Placerville jails are relatively older facilities, and house county inmates, as well as other inmates that have come to our two jails as a result of the California State Public Safety Act / Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109) authorized in April, 2011.

The original South Lake Tahoe jail was built in 1973 and the Placerville jail in 1988. While the original jail was constructed in 1973, the majority of the facility currently in use is an addition which was erected during approximately the same time frame as the Placerville Jail.

ACTIONS

This grand jury conducted on-site inspections of the South Lake Tahoe Jail September 23, 2013, and the Placerville Jail on October 21, 2013. At the time of our visits, the jails were at approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ capacity; South Lake Tahoe at 114 inmates with a capacity of 158, and Placerville housing 243 inmates with a capacity of 311. We interviewed staff regarding the condition and management of the facilities.

FINDINGS

1. Staff at both jails identified several negative impacts to inmate populations due to California AB 109.
2. In spite of their ages, both facilities appeared to be clean and well maintained.
3. Both jails appeared to be well managed and staff morale seemed to be good.
4. Staff indicated that maintaining adequate female staff has been a problem at both jails, but recent aggressive recruitment efforts have been effective in alleviating that problem.
5. Staff reported that turnover has been a problem at the South Lake Tahoe Jail and to a lesser degree in Placerville.
6. Staff commented that inmates with mental health issues, as well as older and homeless inmates, are an ongoing problem. One staff comment was that jails have become a repository for people with mental health issues.
7. Several inmate programs are offered, including substance abuse, life skills, culinary arts (to include state culinary certification), GED education, and religious services.
8. Medical services are out-sourced to the California Forensic Medical Group.

9. 15% of meals are special diets (religious, diabetic, vegetarian, etc.).
10. Staff at the Placerville facility reported that an additional room where attorneys can meet confidentially with clients is needed because of the lengthy time attorneys must wait to use current rooms. It was noted that the pass-through slot in the existing attorney rooms were quite small (only 4 or 5 pages at a time), and often adds much time to a visit as the transfer of paper back and forth does not easily accommodate typical paperwork.

EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

As noted in Finding #1, the implementation of AB 109 has created several negative impacts to inmate populations at both of our jails. Since these problems are serious, and affect other county departments including Probation and Sheriff, they will be specifically addressed in a separate grand jury report to be released later this year focusing on how AB 109 has affected our county.

Based on our inspections of both facilities, we commend the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office under the command of Cpt. Peshon for hiring very competent leaders and staff. Our two County Jails are well maintained and operated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Because of their ages, both Placerville and South Lake Tahoe jails should be evaluated for replacement and/or refurbishment.
2. Reasons for staff turnover at both facilities should be evaluated, and consideration given to adjacent region's salary ranges as well as other retention tools.
3. An advisory team including the Sheriff's Office, county mental health professionals, and other incarceration experts should be formed to make recommendations to improve the care, treatment and housing of mentally ill inmates.
4. Search for a better process for attorney/client paperwork transfer (perhaps in a manner similar to regular mail) to alleviate the attorney wait times. This may eliminate the need for an additional attorney room.

RESPONSES

Responses to both findings and recommendations in this Report are required by law in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05. Address responses to:

The Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury, presiding judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court, 1354 Johnson Blvd., South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150.

This Report has been addressed to the El Dorado County Sheriff for review and response, and provided to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

The Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court additionally requests that the responses be sent electronically as a "Word" file or "PDF" file to facilitate the economical and timely distribution of such responses. Please email responses to the El Dorado County Grand Jury at:
courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org