

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2014-2015

EL DORADO COUNTY JAILS INSPECTIONS

Case GJ-14-02

INTRODUCTION

California Penal Code § 919(b) mandates "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." There are three types of public prisons in El Dorado County: Adult jails, juvenile detention and state operated facilities. This report addresses the condition and management of the adult jails.

BACKGROUND

El Dorado County jails are located in Placerville and South Lake Tahoe, both operated by the El Dorado County Sheriff. They house county inmates and those resulting from the California Public Safety Realignment Act, (AB 109), enacted in April 2011. Additionally, inmates from other counties are housed under contract when space permits, bringing revenue to the County.

METHODOLOGY

Grand Jurors conducted on-site visits of the Placerville jail on September 24, 2014 and the South Lake Tahoe jail on October 8, 2014. Meetings with jail staff were also held during those visits.

DISCUSSION

At the time of Grand Jury visits, the South Lake Tahoe jail was slightly below its capacity of 158 with 143 inmates, while the Placerville facility had 260 inmates, well below its capacity of 311.

The South Lake Tahoe jail was built in 1973 and the Placerville jail in 1988. Both are clean and well maintained. In addition, the Grand Jury observed that they appear to be well managed and have good staff morale.

The Placerville jail building was designed to be expanded; a retrofit is in progress. The booking area is being revamped to increase its safety and efficiency. The intake area is being remodeled to be more user friendly and comply with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations regarding inmate confidentiality of medical personnel and records. Medical services are out-sourced to the California Forensic Medical Group. There is now a new dental treatment room on site.

The Placerville Jail kitchen was being retrofitted with new walk-in refrigerators/freezers. The kitchen is staffed by inmates who are required to submit an application to work there. Religious, diabetic, vegetarian and other special diets constitute 15% of meals served. While not a significant number of meals, this indicates the diversity required.

Several inmate programs are offered, including substance abuse, life skills, General Educational Development (GED) Test education and religious services. A culinary arts program is available that can result in state culinary certification.

Female staff retention and general staff turnover reported in the 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report are no longer an ongoing problem. Aggressive recruitment efforts have been effective in improving retention of female staff. Staff turnover has also been improved after the training manual was revamped.

The need continues for additional space where inmates and their attorneys can meet. There are currently two booths for that purpose, one upstairs and one downstairs. Additionally, a holding cell is also used when the necessary. There was some discussion about using electronic means for inmates and attorneys to communicate such as Skype, but it is not feasible at this time.

Staff at both jails believe there have been significant negative impacts from AB 109. The average age of the inmate population has increased, impacting acute and long-term medical care needs. The sophistication (i.e. incarcerated for more violent crimes) of inmates has grown and gang affiliation has increased, both creating more staff attention to cell assignment and behavior in the general population. Inmates with mental health issues, older and homeless inmates are affected by the increases of inmate population from AB 109.

Staff noted that outside vendors may not have always been paid in a timely manner causing, on one occasion, a food delivery that was almost canceled. They had no knowledge of the cause. The issue has been referred to a separate grand jury investigation.

Staff also feel that more security cameras and intercoms were needed.

Based on the inspections of both facilities, the Grand Jury believes that both county jails are well maintained and operated.

FINDINGS

1. Staff believe AB 109 inmates continue to negatively impact jail operations.
2. Staff believe Inmates with mental health issues, as well as older and homeless inmates are an ongoing problem.
3. Additional space is needed where inmates can meet with their attorneys.
4. Vendors may not have always been paid in a timely manner.
5. More security cameras and intercoms are needed.

NO RECOMMENDATIONS

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 provided to the El Dorado County Sheriff.

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