

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2014-2015

JUVENILE FACILITIES INSPECTIONS

Case GJ-14-05

California Penal Code § 919(b) mandates "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." This report addresses the condition and management of the juvenile facilities in Placerville and South Lake Tahoe.

BACKGROUND

Both El Dorado County Juvenile facilities are operated by the El Dorado County Probation Department. The Placerville Juvenile Hall was built in 1971 and the South Lake Tahoe Juvenile Treatment and Detention Center in 2005. Both have the capacity to house forty wards segregated into discrete male and female areas.

METHODOLOGY

- The Grand Jury toured the Placerville facility on September 17, 2014.
- The Grand Jury toured the South Lake Tahoe facility on October 8, 2014.
- The Grand Jury questioned staff members at both facilities.

DISCUSSION

Staff officers conducted the tours for the Grand Jury. The staff is professional and concerned about the welfare of the wards.

Juvenile offenders (wards) admitted to the facilities are first taken to Marshall or Barton Hospital for a medical exam. New wards enter either facility at an intake area, then change from street clothes to facility clothing in a private bathroom followed by an initial interview. They are initially given grey T-shirts indicating they are newly admitted. Different colors are used to show the level of trust a ward has earned. For example, purple means they have a job in the facility and green denotes an honor status for good behavior.

Wards are classified by the level of danger they present to others and then assigned an individual room. The rooms have cots, a sink and a toilet. There is a small window with bars. At the time of the Grand Jury visit each room was assigned only one ward, although they can accommodate two when the hall population warrants. Wards can request to have a roommate.

Extensive mental health services are provided for anger management, aggression therapy, substance abuse counseling and other classes to help wards after release.

Ward schooling is mandated by state law, and classes are held Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. Religious services are available. The kitchens are well equipped and the food provided appeared to be ample, consisting of a nutritious balance of protein, vegetables, fruits, dairy and grains. Special vegetarian, vegan, diabetic and low sodium diets are available.

There is a very strict code of conduct. Wards are required to walk with their hands behind their back, with their shirts tucked in and without talking. Wards are locked in their rooms when they are not attending school, exercising, in counseling or other activities. Room checks are conducted every 10 minutes. As wards progress in the program, they may earn special considerations including additional recreation time. There is a grievance form that wards can use to address complaints.

Placerville Facility

On the day of the tour, the ward population was below 50 percent of capacity.

A 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report (Case GJ-13-03) found that the facility does not have a sally port, a separate, secure and controlled entrance. The Grand Jury observed that same condition and was informed that, because of the current configuration of the building, the construction of a separate entrance is not feasible.

The staff expressed significant concern that there is no designated therapy space or program space that is necessary for individual sessions, small group sessions or isolation options for ward safety. Perhaps one or more ward rooms could be converted into small offices for those purposes. During the inspection, the Grand Jury observed a therapist using a quiet space in the open gymnasium for an individual counseling session. Although the facility is in need of remodeling to bring it up to date, it appears clean and well maintained. The south exercise area is in disrepair and no longer in use. Other outdoor areas provide sufficient exercise space.

The shower area is shared, having alternate scheduling for male and female use. It is slated to be remodeled into separate male and female facilities for privacy and safety.

South Lake Tahoe Facility

On the day of the tour there were nine wards at the facility.

There are programs for general education, anger management, aggression therapy and substance abuse counseling. A newer program is a book club to encourage reading. There is a well-equipped library and two exercise yards with basketball hoops.

A 2013-2014 Grand Jury Report (Case GJ-13-03) found that maintaining adequate female staff had been mitigated with aggressive recruitment. Recruitment efforts continue and there are currently sufficient female staff.

FINDINGS

1. Staff is professional and appears concerned about the welfare of the wards.
2. A wide variety of mental health counseling is provided to wards.
3. Facilities for individual or small group counseling are not adequate in Placerville.
4. School curriculum is provided to all wards and attendance is mandatory.
5. The facility is well maintained.
6. The Placerville south exercise area is in disrepair and no longer in use. Other outdoor areas provide sufficient exercise space.
7. Staff provides a grievance form to address complaints.
8. At the present time the existing room capacity is adequate due to the low population of wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A study should be conducted to determine the need for a new Placerville facility or ways to improve the existing facility.
2. At a minimum, one or two ward rooms at the Placerville facility should be converted into small offices or conference rooms to ensure privacy when providing individual or small group counseling sessions.

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 Probation Department for review and response, and provided to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

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.