

ARREST A PLUMBER - FIX THE JAIL!

A REPORT ON THE MENDOCINO COUNTY JAIL AND COURTHOUSE HOLDING CELLS

JUNE 9, 2010

Summary

Mendocino County Jail, (MCJ), staffing is frozen at the present time, and there is no anticipation of filling the six vacant positions in the near future.

General Services, (GS), employs eight staff who are on call 24/7 to maintain and repair any emergency services such as electrical, plumbing, heating, and air conditioning.

Several agencies, groups, and individuals in the community provide services to inmates, which can continue upon their release:

- Ukiah Adult School provides educational classes,
- Ford Street Project facilitates Life-Skill Classes, such as Substance Abuse Recovery, Life-Style Change, and Anger Management,
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mendocino County support the Storybook Project; once a week the inmate can record a story on a CD to be sent home to his/her children,
- Alcoholics Anonymous, (AA),
- Narcotics Anonymous, (NA),
- various churches provide religious services upon request.

Methods

On October 28, 2009, the GJ conducted a site visit to the MCJ, with a follow-up visit on November 18th. The GJ interviewed staff, reviewed several documents, including the Budget, Program Schedule, Inmate Population, and Medical Census Reports. Reports reviewed were: Environmental Health, Health Department, and California State Fire Marshall Fire and Safety inspection. The GJ inspected the facilities, including the holding cells, booking area, Sally Port, (a secure parking/transfer area), the kitchen, and laundry.

The Courthouse holding cells were inspected November 18, 2009. The GJ found the cells to be clean and ready for occupancy.

Background

California Penal Code §919(b) states, "the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the county". MCJ falls within this mandate.

Findings, Jail

1. The maximum capacity of the jail is 302 inmates. There were 257 inmates; 35 females and 222 males on October 28, 2009.
2. The jail is divided into several areas; it may be overcrowded due to the necessity to segregate prisoners. The inmates are classified as males, females, non-sentenced, sentenced, violent, protected custody, and those with gang affiliations.
3. Current staff consists of one Captain/Commander, two Lieutenants, six Sergeants, (eight allocated), two Sheriff's Service Technicians, (five allocated), and 41 line-staff, (46 allocated). Staff is ethnically diverse, and seven are bilingual.
4. The daily minimum is eight-line staff with one Sergeant and may fall below minimum if anyone calls in sick.
5. Staffing levels and hiring are frozen at this time. Allocated positions will not be filled due to budgetary cuts.
6. Under-staffing results in long hours, and may result in errors due to fatigue.
7. In 2009, there was one suicide, and 184 reported safety issues involving inmates with mental health problems. No data is kept on attempted suicides.
8. Inmates have reported being assaulted by other inmates.
9. Video security cameras monitor all doors and common areas.
10. The organic garden was un-planted due to the mandatory 50% water rationing. A garden will be planted in the fall.
11. The GJ found the following plumbing problems:
 - toilet bowls are leaking underneath and tank water runs continually,
 - too much or too little water pressure in drinking fountains; some run continually,
 - the plumbing, located on the outside walls of the facility, was found to be leaking,
 - previous repairs were made with self-manufactured parts, including a combination of various metals and plastics.
12. There are no grounds and maintenance personnel assigned to the jail. In previous years, there were one or two full time positions. GS provides eight personnel who can be contacted 24/7 for emergency repairs.
13. The newly installed bakery is providing bread for the jail and juvenile hall, saving taxpayer dollars.
14. Inmates work in the kitchen, laundry, yard, and garden.
15. Schooling is provided by Mendocino County Adult School. Inmates, who stay longer than the average 15-16 days, may work toward earning a General Education Diploma, (GED).
16. Medical, mental health and dental services are provided. A doctor is on site Monday through Friday, two hours per day. Program managers and doctors are always available by telephone. A nursing staff is on site 24 hours a day and a dentist one day a week.
17. The Sheriff's Work Alternative Program, (SWAP), is available for low-risk offenders to work in lieu of serving a jail term.

18. The Home Detention Program, (HDP), is available for low-risk offenders, allowing inmates to work while serving their sentence from home, wearing an ankle bracelet.
19. Discipline of inmates can range from verbal warnings or loss of privileges, to lock down.
20. Regular visits by family and friends are supervised. Appointments by attorneys or clergy are considered by a supervisor on a case by case basis. Video visitations are available upon request.
21. All inmates have access to telephone and mail service. Letters may be read for content. Telephone calls are monitored.
22. Correspondence to attorneys, legislators, or Corrections Standards Authority are logged and inspected for contraband, however, not scanned or read.

Findings, Courthouse Holding Cells

23. There are five full time officers available for transport. Prisoners are transported between the County Jail and the Courthouse.
24. The Courthouse has no Sally Port for the secure transfer of prisoners.
25. Public safety is the highest priority when inmates are in a public environment.
26. Prisoners are checked for contraband when entering or exiting the jail or Courthouse.
27. Prisoner classification makes transport difficult. Gang members, medical, protected custody, violent, and non-violent prisoners can not be transported or held together.
28. Three of the four holding cells hold 10 inmates each. One cell holds six, has a privacy screen, and is designated for females. Line of sight observation of inmates is maintained at all times. Inmates are held for an average of 30 minutes before being moved to the court room.
29. There is an Attorney-Inmate Interview Room.
30. Fire extinguishers were observed to have current certification tags. Two emergency exit doors are controlled by jail personnel. Gun lockers, storage lockers, and a telephone are located outside the holding cell area. Guns are not permitted inside the holding cell area.
31. In one cell, the drinking fountain was found to have high water pressure and spewed water onto the floor when used, creating a safety hazard.
32. A small ceiling area in the North hallway has water damage.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors implement full staffing at the jail, as indicated in the budget. (Findings 3-6)
2. General Services schedule one full time Maintenance staff to maintain the jail. (Findings 11-12)

3. The Mendocino County Sheriff develop a plan to renovate the plumbing.
(Findings 11-12)
4. The Mendocino County Sheriff use asset forfeiture funds to do jail renovation.
(Findings 11-12)

Discussion

The GJ found the Mendocino County Jail in dire need of maintenance and repair. With no new jail on the horizon, maintenance and repair of the existing facility is imperative.

The investment in the jail bakery has proven to be beneficial for inmate vocational training as well as cost savings.

The management and staff are to be commended for their service to the County. Employees appear to be conscientious and concerned about those incarcerated.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County General Services Director (Findings 11-12; Recommendation 2)