

BULGING AT THE SEAMS

A Report on the Mendocino County Jail

May 24, 2009

Summary

The Grand Jury visited the Mendocino County Jail on March 26, 2009. Jurors found the jail to be overcrowded with inmates sleeping on “stack-a-bunks” (a plastic frame with a mattress) on the floor in some units. The buildings have deteriorating plumbing and problems with door locks often needing repair.

Many programs are available to the inmates including an opportunity to get their General Education Diploma (GED), basic adult education, introduction to computers, parenting and life skills, anger management and drug/alcohol recovery programs. Dental and medical care is available as needed.

Methods

The Grand Jury toured the holding cells at the Courthouse and also the County Jail Facility located on Low Gap Road in Ukiah. The Captain and other employees were interviewed.

Background

California Penal Code § 919 (b) states that *The Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the County.*

Findings

1. According to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation May 20, 2008 inspection report, some areas of the jail are overcrowded due to prisoner gender and classification. It currently houses 300 inmates. Review of the average daily census over a two year period found that the facility was consistently near its rated capacity, making it extremely difficult to appropriately house inmates based on their classification.
2. There were inmates sleeping on “stack-a-bunks” on the floor (a plastic frame with a mattress).
3. Some floor tiles at the delivery station doorway and the adjacent drain were broken or missing. All of the broken or missing tiles are scheduled to be replaced by May 20, 2009.
4. The kitchen staff will soon be using newly acquired bakery equipment in an area of the kitchen to bake bread daily. In addition to supplying the main jail facility, they will also provide baked goods for the Juvenile Hall and other detention facilities.

5. The current cost for baked goods for the jail exceeds \$30,000 annually. The equipment will pay for itself in three years.
6. The jail staff is short two sergeants, three correctional deputies, one Sheriff's service officer and a laundry supervisor. The only position allowed to be filled is the laundry supervisor. The current hiring freeze limits the filling of the other positions.
7. The door lock system is prone to excessive wear. Minor repairs are made using limited parts on hand. All other repairs depend on receiving parts from a distant manufacturer. Delivery time is often excessive.
8. The copper plumbing is deteriorating throughout the jail and must continually be replaced.
9. There is a large, well-organized herb and vegetable garden maintained by the inmates and supervised by a contracted part-time employee.
10. A classroom is set up for study programs through which many inmates earn their GED.
11. Computers and computer instruction are available but there is no internet capability.
12. Classes are offered to teach conflict resolution, parenting and life skills, anger management and drug/alcohol recovery.
13. There is no longer a law library at the jail. If an inmate has a legal question, they can send it out to a contracted firm where law students will research it and return an answer.
14. There is a dentist on site once a week.
15. There is medical staff on site seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.
16. Prescription drugs are dispensed and taken under close monitoring by the medical staff.
17. There is a Mendocino County Sheriff's Office Corrections Division brochure describing all of the inmate services.
18. Inmate property is bagged but not inventoried at intake. Inventory of personal property is done during the booking process.
19. Employee stress counseling is available. There is a minister available as well as a psychologist.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office:

1. repair and replace kitchen floor tiles (Finding 3)
2. research and identify the cause of the plumbing deterioration and, if found to be cost-effective, take steps to monitor and correct it. (Finding 8)

Discussion

The Grand Jury encourages continuing the long range plans for a new County facility that would be a combined justice center including the Courts, Jail, Juvenile

Hall, Sheriff's Office, District Attorney, Public Defender and Grand Jury office. This consolidation is intended to be highly beneficial to county operations and its taxpayers.

Required Responses

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

Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Director, Mendocino County General Services Agency (Findings 3, 6-7; All Recommendations)