

MENDOCINO COUNTY SHERIFF'S COAST SECTOR SUB-STATION AND HOLDING CELLS IN FORT BRAGG

March 22, 2007

Summary

The Grand Jury conducted its mandated annual visit to the Coastal Sub-station. The inspection included holding cells, evidence rooms, budgets and staffing, and perimeter security fencing.

The station faces major problems due to unfilled Deputy positions and facility maintenance. The staff shortages would be partially alleviated by a county-wide prisoner transport system.

Background

California Penal Code §919 (b) states "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county." The 2006/2007 Mendocino County Grand Jury undertook their charge with a visit to the MCSO Coast Sector Sub-Station and Holding Cells.

Methods

The Grand Jury visited the MCSO Coast Sector Facilities, and interviewed Sheriff's Department personnel regarding operations of the facilities including Booking Area, Holding Cells, Evidence Rooms, and Parking Area. The Grand Jury also reviewed documents including inspection reports and evidence room tracking records.

Findings

1. The present staff consists of one Lieutenant, three Sergeants, 13 Deputies, one Detective, and one Secretary. A deputy acts as Bailiff; the Secretary serves as the Evidence Technician. At the present time there are three unfilled Deputy positions. Two others are seeking employment elsewhere.
2. Staff shortages place a burden on remaining officers to provide effective enforcement.
3. Deputies are required to transport prisoners to Ukiah and may make two or more trips per shift.
4. The Grand Jury determined there was no definitive budget for the Coast Sector operations.
5. The two holding cells are clean and recently modified to prevent injury to prisoners. Both cells require painting to complete the modifications.
6. The security gate controlling access to the rear of the sub-station is inoperable. It is intended to protect impounded vehicles, hazardous materials, an outside evidence room and the sallyport (prisoner intake/outtake). It has been intermittently inoperable for several years due to coastal weather conditions.

7. The barbed wire atop the perimeter fencing is in a state of disrepair.
8. The MCSO Sector Sub-Station lacks a security alarm system which would further protect impounded property.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. the three vacant deputy positions be filled. (Findings 1 & 2)
2. the existing prisoner transport system be extended to the entire county. (Findings 2 & 3)
3. a comprehensive and site-specific MCSO budget be developed for the Coastal Sector facilities and operations. (Finding 4)
4. the security gate be made operable and suitable to the coastal environment (Finding 6)
5. repair of perimeter fencing and security gate be maintained on a priority basis. (Findings 6 & 7)
6. an alarm system be installed at the Sub-Station. (Finding 8)

Comments

By filling the three vacant deputy positions, the Coastal Sector would be better able to provide enforcement services to the community. A recommended solution for the County would be to provide a 24/7 prisoner transport service.

The problem with the security gate is one of continual deterioration due to a hostile coastal environment. The gate when operational provides an important security feature for the Sub-Station. It is considered imperative that it remain in operating order.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors: Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and Recommendations 1 through 6

Sheriff, Mendocino County Sheriff's Department: Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and Recommendations 1 through 6

Director, Mendocino County Department of General Services: Findings 5, 6, 7, and Recommendations 4 and 5