

# **MENDOCINO COUNTY JUVENILE HALL**

May 3, 2007

## ***Summary***

The Grand Jury conducted its mandated annual visit to the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall (MCJH) on Low Gap Road in Ukiah. This facility houses youths under the age of 18 who are wards of the court. It is extremely well managed and is dedicated to providing a safe and secure environment. The administrators and staff of the Juvenile Hall have implemented several programs designed to educate and rehabilitate these youths for re-entry into society.

## ***Background***

California Penal Code Section §919 (b) states "the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the county." The Juvenile Hall falls under this directive.

## ***Methods***

The Grand Jury oversight included inspection of the cells, booking area, sally port, recreation areas, classrooms, and food handling facilities. The following documents were reviewed: complaints submitted by youths, a 2005 Corrections Standard Authority Safety Inspection Report, 2004 State Fire Marshal Fire/Life Safety Inspection Report, the 2006 Report on Admissions, 2006 Public Health inspection report, Mendocino County Buildings Dept. inspection report, Mendocino County Office of Education report, and the 2005 Juvenile Justice Commission Juvenile Halls and Camps Inspection Report. Senior management and several employees were interviewed.

## ***Findings***

1. The staff consists of: one Superintendent, four Supervising Correctional Officers, 22 Correctional Officers, one Licensed Vocational Nurse, one Mental Health Clinician, and five staff who are employed in the kitchen.
2. There are six unfilled Correctional Officer positions.
3. It is difficult filling these positions due to low pay and a lack of qualified applicants. Most failing applicants are unable to pass the background investigation.
4. The maximum capacity for the facility is 43 youths, on average there are 27 to 35.
5. All youths fill out a health questionnaire and receive a physical, which includes a TB test.
6. Older or violent youths are separated from the younger ones.
7. Males and females are housed separately; however, they attend school and outdoor recreation activities together.
8. Individual gangs are not segregated. The facility has zero tolerance for any gang activity, including graffiti.

9. All youths are given an orientation on acceptable behavior each time they are incarcerated. There is a “step program”, whereby all youths can advance from an entrance step level of zero, and earn additional privileges by achieving steps one and two.
10. Good behavior is rewarded with activities that include “in-house field trips”, gardening and yard work. Magazines, posters, CD’s, books, TV, and telephone privileges are also provided.
11. Eighty percent (80%) of the youths are repeat offenders and of these 75% exhibit unacceptable behavior.
12. Youths with mental health and/or behavioral issues require approximately 85% of the Correctional Officers’ time.
13. Seventy five percent (75%) of the youths have substance abuse problems.
14. Special diets are available for any youth who requires it; diabetic and low fat diets are two examples. The menu is varied throughout a six-week cycle.
15. The contracting phone company transfers some of the money they receive from collect call charges to the MCJH. This money is used for recreational and entertainment purposes for the youths.
16. MCJH provides rehabilitation of youths through counseling, life skills and parenting classes, and Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous programs. Religious services are available for those who wish to attend.
17. Year-around school is mandatory.
18. Video observation and security are maintained for doors and common areas throughout the facility at all times.
19. At night, individual cells are visually checked every fifteen minutes.
20. Maintenance is provided by the General Services Agency on a priority basis.
21. The maximum sentence at Juvenile Hall is one year.
22. MCJH had a County funded juvenile work program which was discontinued in 2003.
23. Asset Forfeiture funds can be used to fund the juvenile work program for one year.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. a study be made to determine suitable wages. (Findings 2-3)
2. the six vacant staff positions be filled. (Finding 2-3)
3. budgeted staff not be reduced. (Finding 1-2)
4. the juvenile work program be reinstated. (Finding 22)
5. asset forfeiture monies be utilized to fund the first year of a juvenile work program. (Findings 22-23)

### ***Response Required***

Mendocino County Juvenile Hall (Findings 1-22; Recommendations 1-5)

Board of Supervisors (Finding 22-23; Recommendations 1, 3-5)

Mendocino County Juvenile Probation (Finding 21; Recommendation 4-5)