

INSPECTION OF THE SISKIYOU COUNTY JAIL AND DAY REPORTING CENTER



SUMMARY:

In accordance with the State of California Penal Code, county correctional facilities in California may be visited and inspected by the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury (SCCGJ). The SCCGJ made arrangements with the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department to visit the county jail facility. Also under the control and supervision of the Sheriff's Department is the Day Reporting Center. It is in fact an extension of jail operations and under the control of correctional staff. The Grand Jury was invited to observe the facility during the visit to review changes and procedures conducted there. As a result, the center was included in the inspection. These visits included a review of normal operating procedures, staffing, budget issues, improvements, and proposed changes for the future.

BACKGROUND:

Consistent with previous reports and documentation, the SCCGJ observed that the inability to accommodate the number of inmates has been identified and documented for many years. County funding for a new jail facility, as part of a State of California cost sharing requirement, has been considered by the citizens of Siskiyou County as a sales tax increase in 2014 and again in 2016. Both efforts failed to pass by the voters. The County Board of Supervisors (BOS) has been seeking solutions to the problem which comes down to funding and a suitable location. The current proposal being considered is to convert the existing 40 bed Charlie Byrd Youth Correctional Center into a 160 bed jail. This has considerable merit but completion of this project if approved is not expected until at least 2023.



The current jail was built in 1987 and began operations in 1988. The original design capacity was for 68 inmates serving misdemeanor violations and those awaiting trial and sentencing for both felonies and misdemeanors. The County has installed double bunks and has made other changes where possible to increase capacity to a maximum of 104 inmates. The jail is being managed by a

staff of 35 sworn officers supported by 11 administrative staff. There are 5 correctional officers operating the Day Reporting Center. The inmate ages vary greatly from 18 to 70.

The staff was cooperative and supportive of the visit and receptive to concerns and questions presented. This greatly enhanced the overall picture of daily operations and procedures within the facilities.

METHODOLOGY:

In attendance were members of the Civil Grand Jury who inspected the physical layout of the jail and the Day Reporting Center (DRC). Staff at these facilities explained to the SCCGJ procedures for handling of inmates. In addition, the SCCGJ reviewed facility operations, maintenance, security, and health care services available to inmates.

DISCUSSION:

Steps to correct the overcrowding situation at the jail or replace the facility have failed. The issue was placed on the ballot twice to meet matching fund requirements by the State of California and failed to pass. This has placed potential and unacceptable risk to staff managing the jail and to public safety within the county.

Public safety is the number one mission and responsibility of government at all levels. The California Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011(AB109) mandated that low-level felony inmates normally serving in state prisons are now placed in county jails. As a result, the jail has undergone a major transformation and an increased number of inmates housed or received at the County Jail. This has caused an additional burden on facilities already stretched to the limit. The jail is operating at maximum capacity with felons and those awaiting trial or sentencing. There is little to no room for misdemeanor or lower level felony inmates to be placed at the jail. This causes lower level offenders to be released as higher level offenders arrive so not to exceed maximum capacity. Court action is often required to release inmates back into the community placing them with the public and on the street.

The old jail, which is located directly across the street from the existing facility, had to close by court order due to age, condition, size, and inability to meet the needs of a growing community. The replacement was built on a very tight budget. The current jail facility is suffering from many of the same problems.

The cost per inmate for each day in the jail is \$139 which is an increase of 3.5 % over last year. The current annual budget is \$4.5 million or an 11% increase from the last fiscal year. Much of the required training to keep staff current in their training is conducted on-site whenever possible to keep costs low. Overtime is carefully managed to control expenses while maintaining a safe working environment. A larger jail serving a much larger inmate population would not cost significantly more to maintain per inmate due to technology changes and better inmate control features. The inmate to staff ratio would also be improved.

While conducting the tour, it was evident to the SCCGJ that the jail facility is clean and well-run utilizing inmate labor whenever possible for cleaning and maintenance. Although operating at nearly twice the designed capacity, use of available space is outstanding. The SCCGJ observed two of the biggest challenges: 1) the preparation of meals and 2) laundry. By using an innovative bagging system, clothing is cleaned without the need for separation, utilizing a single commercial washer and dryer. The kitchen is small but functions well to provide service and quality food.

Inmates are separated based on risk assessment whenever possible and placed into double bunk cells where they are closely monitored and controlled. An adequate but small recreational area is available as needed. Mingling inmates is always a negative factor in an overcrowded facility where they are confined in close proximity with those of higher risk; space for anything else is simply not available. The classification of prisoners based on the threat to others is an important aspect in detention life to reduce tension and maintain order.

When jail staff need to move inmates from one area of the facility to another, staff have to take the inmates into areas such as control rooms, hallways, and

walkways which can cause interaction with staff. The facility cannot be modified to eliminate this situation so staff must be aware of potential problems and be on alert for risks. The jail was designed to accommodate misdemeanor offenders and those awaiting court proceedings, not high risk felons. The control rooms utilized for close monitoring of the facility are a mix of old and new technology, all centrally located, which is adequate and seems to work well. However, there are blind spots which are always a concern.

The medical treatment area is small but adequately staffed to meet the needs of the inmates. About 15% of inmates need mental health services. Medication is issued as prescribed and voluntarily taken. It can be difficult to manage and handle inmates who refuse to take medication. The County cannot force inmates to take medication without a Court order. The medical staff was increased to 6 by adding two part time Licensed Vocational Nurses.

Maintenance for such an overcrowded facility is always a challenge. Electrical problems, leaking roofs, water heating equipment, and air conditioning systems are always an ongoing issue for the single maintenance technician on staff. The building was originally built on a tight budget and operates beyond design capacity. It is a credit to staff that it functions as well as it does.

Last year's SCCGJ inspection and report identified the issue of body cavity searches. This issue was addressed and it was recommended that medically trained staff be considered for on-site searches. Currently if this procedure is required, the inmate is transported to Fairchild Medical Center. The issue of body cavity searches was reviewed again during this visit. Staff explained that they do not wish to change their current procedure as it is rarely necessary and would not be cost effective. Currently, strip searches are conducted as needed and are considered adequate.

When an individual is transported to the jail and taken to the central booking area, they are searched and processed. The processing officer then makes a determination whether to release or detain the individual in the booking area, there are four holding cells, two sobering cells, and one safety cell. Individuals can be placed into any one of these pending disposition. A problem arises if a

person is to be detained and not released. Admittance to the general jail population often requires another prisoner to be released.

Quick processing, while efficient, brings up another issue for individuals after release. Once back outside, many, especially the homeless, have nowhere to go. They often come from communities outside of Yreka and unless transportation is arranged, they are stuck here. For example, a homeless individual picked up in Weed was arrested and released five times in one night. It was cold outside and he had no place to go, so he would trespass in local business areas in order to be arrested again and again. This takes valuable law enforcement time away from the local police.

This was addressed by the Grand Jury report last year and is still an unresolved issue. The BOS has indicated that they are willing to work with the City of Yreka to solve this problem.

The Day Reporting Center (DRC) is an outside work program developed by the Sheriff's Department operated and controlled by jail staff. Lower risk inmates are placed in the DRC to serve their remaining sentences by working on projects in the community. This program reduces cost to the county. Inmates accepted into the program sign a contract agreeing to rules regarding work, conduct, and attendance. This program has an outstanding record.

The DRC programs and services are individually coordinated to assist inmates with the chief goal to reduce the potential recidivism. One day of inmate service at the DRC translates to a day served in jail enabling inmates to complete their sentence outside of incarceration. This program is cost effective when compared to incarceration. Additionally, inmates are provided an opportunity to build a solid work ethic. Opportunities include lumber milling, furniture construction, animal husbandry, and other skills. Additional work programs include roadway and habitat cleanup, firewood production for the needy, and non-profit activities which benefits the community.

The DRC has developed a well-organized educational program to enable inmates to further their education to obtain a GED or beyond. Teachers at the local high

school and college assist the inmates to achieve their goals and prepare them for the future.

The DRC has developed a “bike restoration program” where old or fixable bikes are collected, repaired, and donated to the needy. During the visit, we were able to see some of this work in progress. It is quite refreshing and a valuable resource.

The DRC is well maintained, equipped, and managed by trained staff. The County DRC staff maximizes its limited resources efficiently.

One issue the SCCGJ observed is accountability for inmates assigned to the DRC who do not have a reliable residential address so they can be reached. For example, homeless inmates who do not have a residence are allowed to participate in the program. Another example of this problem was an inmate with less than ten days remaining to serve, simply vanished. The honor system can only go so far and inmates should always be accountable and reachable.

A program sponsored by the California Department of Corrections and CALFIRE, accepts low-risk felons currently serving sentences and establishes conservation camps to fight wildfires throughout the state. One such location for this program to be implemented could be the Deadwood Conservation Camp located in Siskiyou County. Two possible advantages for Siskiyou County with this program are a reduction in inmate cost from \$139 to \$10 per day and resulting in space being made available in the jail. Qualifications for this program are high, but the potential for cost savings and increased space availability in the jail could make this worth exploring.

An issue presented during the jail visit was the impact a program with Deadwood would have with the Day Reporting Center. Both would have to compete with the same candidates for either program and both receive funding from the state. Jail staff feel they would rather maintain control of inmates locally and not send them out to Deadwood. Further, they feel that this would not result in a reduction in jail population as they are being considered for release to the DRC anyway and

not confined to the jail. Some of these felons, low-risk or not, are being released into the community.

It is clear that this inspection has revealed that the reported issues facing the jail are a result of the inadequacy and lack of capacity of the facility due to the present overcrowding. The need to release inmates who should be retained is creating a possible threat to public safety. The staff is doing everything possible to maintain the jail with their limited resources, however, only so much can be done with the lack of adequate space. The voters have made their decision at the ballot box. The county now has the responsibility to rectify this problem. The State has approved their portion by way of a grant, but additional funding by the County is required.

FINDINGS:

F1. As a result of AB109, the jail has been operating beyond design capacity for many years and the jail cannot be modified to increase capacity. The need to release prisoners, to make room for higher risk ones, places an unacceptable risk to the citizens of Siskiyou County and the facility staff working there. A larger, modern and better equipped jail is desperately needed. The county's application for state funding (\$20 million from AB900) was awarded but the county is required to contribute the remaining funds (approximately \$2 to \$4 million). Funding is currently under consideration by the BOS. If such additional funding is provided by the county, the plan is to modify the existing Charlie Byrd Juvenile Correctional Center with an estimated date for completion in 2023.

F2. The potential for the county to participate in the Deadwood Conservation Camp program could possibly save the county money. While this may have an impact with the Day Reporting Center operation, the advantages of entering into a contract with Deadwood should be investigated. The need to investigate participation in the Deadwood Program becomes greater, considering the overcrowded condition of the current jail, the estimated completion time for a new jail facility, and subsequent release of inmates to make room for higher risk prisoners. Although leadership within the county has implemented programs such

as the DRC, jail overcrowding remains a significant issue. It appears that other options such as the Deadwood Program, have remained undeveloped.

F3. Access to the Day Reporting Center for inmates without reliable contact information means the Center may not be able to reach a prisoner when necessary. A primary objective of the DRC is to prevent a re-occurrence of an offense. The lack of inmate contact information can contribute to a failure to achieve that goal. The DRC is being utilized to accommodate inmates who cannot be placed into the jail due to overcrowding. Some of them become homeless after release from jail. The DRC does not have an adequate system to contact homeless inmates participating in the DRC program. There is a possible threat to public safety if the DRC cannot contact a released inmate due to lack of contact information.

F4. Individuals released from central booking who live outside of Yreka, with no way to return home within Siskiyou County, is still an unresolved issue. From years past, prior to release, jail staff attempts to arrange for transportation. A better program to insure public safety is not defined. The example given of a homeless individual picked up in Weed was arrested and released five times in one night underscores the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. Every effort should be taken to replace the jail with a new expandable facility that is capable of meeting the needs of the county now and into the future. The old jail was forced to be replaced by court action which resulted in the inadequate facility now in use. Unless something is done to produce a new jail to meet the needs of Siskiyou County, public safety will remain vulnerable. An approved and detailed plan to replace the jail by the BOS should be announced with required funding as soon as possible before state funding expires.

R2. The Deadwood Conservation Camp Program should be investigated to determine if it has merit and is feasible for Siskiyou County. If only one bed is opened and available with savings to the county, it would be worth it!

R3. Access to the Day Reporting Center for inmates should only be granted if reliable contact information is available and maintained.

R4. Siskiyou County residents released from jail should be assisted with transportation back to their home or community. For example, public transportation could be used if a bus stop were available or the arresting officer from another community could be required to return the released inmate to their community. This may help alleviate the burden placed on the City of Yreka. If an individual is arrested in an outlying community for an offense not resulting in retention in the jail, a system to issue a citation and notice to appear should be considered to eliminate the need to transport the individual to the jail for booking.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES:

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury requests the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors respond to R1 and R2 and the County Sheriff's Department address all the findings and recommendations in this report and take appropriate action.