

SONOMA COUNTY DETENTION FACILITIES INSPECTION

SUMMARY

Section 919 of the California Penal Code mandates that the Grand Jury conduct an annual inspection of each detention facility within the County. There are three facilities that fall within this mandate: the Main Adult Detention Facility (MADF), the North County Detention Facility (NCDF), and the Juvenile Justice Center (JJC).

State Assembly Bill 109, the 2011 Public Safety Realignment (Realignment), effective October 1, 2011, mandates that “individuals sentenced to non-serious, non-violent or non-sex offenses will serve their sentences in county jails instead of a state prison.” As a result, inmates could serve sentences of up to 15 years in the MADF or NCDF. As of February 2013, there were five County jail inmates serving sentences of between five and ten years and one inmate serving a sentence in excess of ten years. The detention facilities were designed to house inmates for an average of 60 days.

The adult facilities are adequate for the shorter sentences traditionally served there prior to the implementation of Realignment. They are inadequate in terms of recreation and outdoor access, visiting protocols, available programs, and other aspects for inmates with longer sentences coming into the County jail system as a result of Realignment.

In the adult facilities, one guard may oversee 60 or more inmates. The guards are unarmed and maintain control through non-physical means. Guards focus on establishing rapport with the inmates and are vigilant in observing inmate behavior, taking steps to intercede when a situation arises that could lead to an altercation. Since one guard typically oversees a large number of inmates, inmate time outside of cells is limited but meets the State guidelines of at least 35 minutes per day. Areas for outside exercise are small. They are covered or uncovered, and access to direct sunlight is limited.

Meals meet the American Dietary Association guidelines. The menus differ among the three facilities, but in all cases the kitchens make accommodations for special dietary needs and religious beliefs. Medical and dental services are available to the inmates, and medication is dispensed by licensed medical staff.

Education and personal development programs are available in each of the facilities. Detainees who demonstrate positive behavior are eligible to participate. Access to the programs can be denied when behavior does not meet the guidelines.

The Grand Jury found the detention facilities to be safe and operating within state-mandated guidelines. However, adjusting to the demands of Realignment is a challenge, and accommodations must be made for long-term incarcerations.

BACKGROUND

Consistent with State regulations, the Grand Jury conducts an inspection of County detention facilities each year.

APPROACH

The Grand Jury inspected all three County detention facilities: the MADF, the NCDF, and the JJC. We spoke with managers, line staff, medical personnel, contract personnel, and detainees. We reviewed procedures for intake, psychological evaluation, medical and pharmacy coverage, grievances, educational and developmental programs, and free time activities.

DISCUSSION

Main Adult Detention Facility (MADF)

The MADF, with a capacity of 1001, housed 688 inmates on the inspection date. The facility is divided into self-contained blocks of cells with a single guard station (modules). Detainees are categorized as general custody, protective custody, or administrative segregation. Mental health modules house male and female inmates who are going through detoxification or who have ongoing mental health issues. Inmates are assessed during the intake process based on minimum, medium, and maximum security risk levels and previous arrest records. Inmates are advised during the intake process of the general guidelines for behavior, punishment, and the grievance process. Male inmates are housed in multiple modules. Female inmates in the general population are housed in a single module. Cells are utilitarian and house one or two inmates. Inmates clean their own cells. Natural light is limited to small windows in each cell.

Security cameras and intercoms are connected to a central dispatch area to control module entry and exit. The guards are unarmed and maintain control of the inmate population through non-physical means. Guards are vigilant in observing inmate behavior and are ready to intercede in situations that might escalate. Inmate time outside of cells is limited but meets the state mandate. Guards check on inmates in their cells one or two times an hour. Jail clothing, for the most part, is one size fits all. This can be problematic for the female population since pants that are too long can lead to difficulty walking and possible falls.

Inmates who cooperate and work well with others are able to earn points for privileges and are allowed to work in specified areas. Points can be used toward telephone calls and the commissary.

The kitchen provides three meals a day, two hot and one cold. Inmates can buy additional food items from the commissary. The kitchen is manned by contract personnel and inmates who are housed in minimum-security modules and have earned the privilege to work. All inmates eat in their cells. Female inmates work one meal shift and male inmates work the others. Cutlery and cleaning products are kept in locked cabinets.

Time for education, personal development programs, and recreation are available to the general population. No-contact visitation occurs on a regular basis. Recreation areas are small and contained, covered or uncovered, with limited direct sunlight. While this arrangement may be adequate for inmates whose sentences are a few months or less, it is less suitable for inmates serving longer sentences. Inmates have access to a library cart and can request additional reading materials from the local library. There are on-site mental health and nursing staff and a pharmacy that dispenses medication as prescribed. A doctor is on site several times a week and on call 24/7. A dentist is on-site once a week.

Inmates requiring immediate medical care beyond basic treatment needs are transported to a nearby hospital.

Telephone calls are recorded and incoming and outgoing mail is screened and read. Inmate grievances are logged manually rather than in a computer database, making searches and compilation of statistical information cumbersome and difficult.

North County Detention Facility (NCDF)

The NCDF is an all-male facility with a capacity of 575. It housed 525 inmates on the inspection date. The NCDF houses minimum-security inmates. Inmates are evaluated for work detail at booking and cannot have violence charges, escape histories, or disciplinary behavior problems. In addition to kitchen and laundry work, inmates have other work opportunities, including the on-premises gardens, highway cleanup work crews, or the County Fair and the animal shelter. Work opportunities can be canceled and points taken away as a disciplinary action.

Inmates at NCDF are housed in dormitory-style modules with groups of up to 60 inmates to a dormitory. All modules have large windows and were clean. Clothing consists of shirts, sweats, and tennis shoes for pre-trial or pre-sentencing detainees and general population inmates, or jeans, shirts, jackets, and work boots for inmates who work on outside work detail. Inmates have at-will access to specific outside areas for recreation. Visitation occurs on a regular basis. Inmates have the opportunity to participate in a variety of educational and personal development programs.

Inmates eat two cold meals and one hot meal per day in a cafeteria and have access to a commissary. Inmate access to medical care is provided in the same manner as at MADF.

Inmates awaiting pre-trial hearings or who have not yet been sentenced are housed in a separate module. They are allowed outside for recreation in a small fenced, covered area separate from the other inmates. They have a large common area for playing cards or games or watching television.

Telephone calls are recorded and incoming and outgoing mail is screened and read.

Juvenile Justice Center (JJC)

The JJC opened in 2005 and has a capacity of 140. There were 80 residents on the inspection date. The facility's primary function is to provide temporary, safe, and secure detention for juveniles. The facility is divided into pods of single and dual occupancy cells. It is well maintained and allows ample natural light. Resident artwork lines the hallways. All corridors and entrances to the pods are monitored via camera and entry and exit are controlled through a dispatcher. Covered and open air outdoor areas are expansive and provide space for team and individual sports.

Medical staff, a psychologist, and marriage and family therapists are on-site six days a week; a doctor is on-site three times a week and is otherwise on-call. Medication is dispensed by licensed medical staff seven days a week. At the present time, dental services are provided off-site.

Youths are detained at the facility for an average of 30 days. There has been a significant increase in the number of mental health issues. The goal is to have youth return to the community as soon as reasonably possible. Residents attend school in their pods and have the opportunity to participate in life skills and

behavioral programs. On weekends, residents are restricted to their pods. Parental visits are allowed on a regular basis.

Residents are grouped based on security risk and levels of cooperation and receptiveness to improving poor behavior. The resident to guard ratio is low, with ten residents to one guard during the day and twenty residents to one guard at night. Guards are vigilant in observing behavior and are trained to recognize any initiation or escalation of tension and potential violence. Cells are checked every 15 minutes.

Residents can earn points for good behavior. A library cart supplies books to the pods and books can be requested from the local library. The current process requires knowledge of a specific book title or author to place a request. There is no option for requesting a genre of book. Telephone calls and outgoing and incoming mail are not monitored. The JJC provides a number of educational classes and personal development programs.

The residents we interviewed stated that the guard staff was outgoing and supportive. The grievance process is explained at intake and grievance forms are available in each pod. The kitchen serves three meals a day, two hot and one cold, plus two snacks. There is no commissary in the facility. Meals are eaten in the pods and are served cafeteria style. Clothing fits well and size options are available.

FINDINGS

- F1. The implementation of Realignment presents many challenges to adult detention facility operations.
- F2. Clothing for female inmates at the MADF is ill fitting and could lead to falls and injury.
- F3. Inmate time out of cells at the MADF is limited.
- F4. MADF recreation areas are less than ideal for long-term inmates.
- F5. The logging of inmate grievances at the MADF and NCDF is manual and cumbersome.
- F6. The choice of library books at the JJC is limited.
- F7. The JJC process for requesting a book requires knowledge of the book's title or author.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. A plan to address necessary changes to housing, recreation, programs, and visitation for adult detention facilities as a result of Realignment be developed and implemented.
- R2. Clothing size choices be made available for female inmates at the MADF to lessen the likelihood of falls and injury.
- R3. Additional guard coverage be provided to allow inmates at the MADF to have more frequent time out of their cells.

- R4. The logging of inmate grievances be computerized.
- R5. Book donations to the JJC be encouraged.
- R6. The method of requesting books at the JJC be modified to include the ability to request a genre.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses as follows:

- R1, R2, R3, R4 - Sonoma County Sheriff in charge of MADF and NCDF
- R5, R6 - Sonoma County Chief Probation Officer

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- California State Sheriffs' Association (CSSA), Long-Term Offenders in County Jails CSSA Survey (February 25, 2013) - www.calsheriffs.org
- Summary of MADF and NCDF operations, including budget information, general statistical data, mental health program and statistical data, medical services information, and program information
- MADF Inmate Handbook
- JJC Program List

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.