

Up Against the Wall: Sonoma County Detention Facilities

Summary

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inspected the Main Adult Detention Facility (MADF), the North County Detention Facility (NCDF), and the Juvenile Justice Center (JJC) in September, 2013.

The Grand Jury found all detention facilities to be clean, well maintained, and secure. The Grand Jury's major findings relate to the impact of State Assembly Bill 109 (Public Safety Realignment, or Realignment). The situation is aggravated by a high number of unfilled positions. The investigation also found that the MADF is dealing with a significant population of inmates with mental and physical illnesses.

Realignment requires the prison system to redirect nonviolent offenders to local jails. From January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2013, the incarcerated population rose by 537 due to Realignment. This increase brought both adult facilities to 95 percent of their capacities. The average length of jail sentences has risen to 27 months. The MADF is designed to hold prisoners up to three years. Probation records show 65 percent of those diverted to local jails through Realignment are classified at high risk to re-offend, requiring greater supervision.

Correctional deputies can work up to 60 hours of mandatory overtime per month, depending on the jail population and the number of deputies unavailable due to illness or injury. The increased population of offenders with mental health needs at the MADF has required facility upgrades to increase safety for both personnel and inmates.

The Grand Jury's recommendations focus on the Sheriff's Office, encouraging it to continue efforts to address the impact of Realignment and to address the needs of inmates with health problems.

Background

California Penal Code Section 919(b) requires that each civil grand jury conduct annual inspections of detention facilities in its county.

Approach

The Grand Jury inspected the MADF, the NCDF, and the JJC. It also reviewed policies and procedures for intake and processing, medical and psychological evaluations, and educational programs and activities.

Discussion

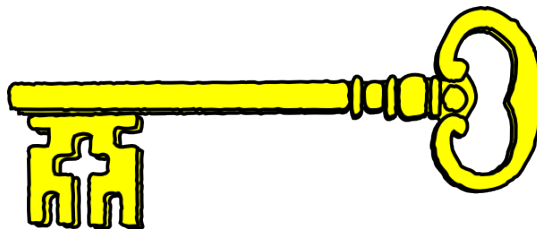
Main Adult Detention Facility (MADF)

The MADF was built in 1991 with a capacity of 500 inmates. In 1997, an addition of 290 beds brought capacity to 790. The MADF houses medium- and maximum-security inmates, both pre-trial and sentenced. Under Realignment, those convicted of crimes not considered violent, serious, or sexual serve time in local jails instead of state prisons. An increase in the inmate population has also resulted in longer sentences. The extreme case is a 15-year sentence, with 10 years served in jail.



As of December 31, 2013, the active adult population was 1068 including inmates and probationers. The active population is the net of the total intake less those who have exited the system. Some inmates require increased mental and medical health care, and the MADF has expanded and remodeled accordingly. But the influx exceeds what was anticipated. Probation records show that 65 percent of those released are classified as high risk to reoffend, which requires heightened supervision. As a result, several vacant housing units in the North County facility were opened.

As of September 2013, 20 correctional deputy positions remained vacant, in addition to the 20 percent of staff on leave due to injuries or illness. Twenty new deputies had been hired by the end of 2013, and the Sheriff's Office had 10 to 15 positions to fill as of March 2014. This shortage has led to mandatory overtime of up to 60 hours a month for correctional deputies. For every 700 applicants, 250 are interviewed and undergo background checks. Of those, approximately 3 percent are hired.



The MADF is designed for direct, close supervision of inmates. It is divided into modules, each one a self-contained cell block with one guard station. Cameras and intercoms continuously monitor inmates and employees. Two modules house inmates with alcohol, drug detox, and mental health issues. A third module houses females, and the fourth is designated for maximum-security inmates. Visiting is strictly regulated: three visits per week, limited to 30 minutes, permitting no physical contact. The dress code is strictly defined. All visitors must pass through a security detector.

Sixty-six percent of inmates require medication for physical and/or mental conditions. Due to an increasing population of inmates with illnesses, the MADF has made upgrades to increase the safety for personnel as well as inmates. Coverage by nursing staff is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. An onsite physician and ancillary staff (lab, x-ray, etc.) are available during business hours and on call. Local hospitals provide acute and emergency care. All correctional deputies are trained in first responder aid and CPR. Automatic electronic defibrillators are available. The watch commander is directly linked to the County EMS system via radio dispatch. A discharge planner assists in placing some inmates into County mental health treatment following release from the MADF.

North County Detention Facility (NCDF)

The NCDF houses minimum-security male inmates. At the time of inspection, approximately 365 were at the facility, which has a capacity of 561 inmates. The average daily population at NCDF is 300. Those held for pre-trial hearings or sentencing are housed in a separate building from the general population and have access to a fenced, covered recreation area. The other inmates share dormitory facilities with bunk beds that can house up to 60 prisoners each and offer access to designated outdoor recreation areas.

Inmates dress in jeans, shirts, and tennis shoes devoid of ornamentation, printing, or gang colors. Suitable clothing and boots are provided for those who qualify for outside work duties, such as assignments at the County fair, the 2-acre onsite garden, or road clean-up crews. The jail industry program allows eligible, low-risk volunteers to care for many plant varieties. Vegetables from the garden are served at the NCDF and the MADF. Local food banks receive any excess produce. The program also offers free vegetable starts and seeds to schools. Twice per year, it holds a public plant sale, with proceeds going to support its programs.

In addition to the agricultural program, inmates may participate in educational and personal development programs, such as English as a Second Language, parenting, anger management,

and alcohol and drug awareness. They may also take courses in general education. Those who complete the requirements earn a diploma and may participate in a graduation ceremony.

Medical services at the NCDF are similar to those at the MADF.

Visiting hours are strictly controlled. Visitors' attire, identification, and behavior are closely monitored. All visitors must pass through a metal detector. They may visit one hour per week. Minors must be accompanied by an adult.

The Grand Jury found the facilities to be clean and well maintained.

Juvenile Justice Center (JJC)

The JJC is a modern building completed in 2005. It contains two juvenile courtrooms; offices for public defenders, a district attorney, and probation officers; a kitchen; and a command center with video monitoring throughout all areas of the complex. The Grand Jury found the facility to be carefully maintained. Art work done by the youthful offenders brightens the walls.

Teachers work with children from mid-elementary through high school and tailor the curriculum to each student. Food is served in the common area visible from each living unit. Three secure, large, covered outdoor areas provide ample exercise opportunities. Many community-based organizations provide programs and services to help youth gain the skills needed to function successfully upon return to the community. These organizations continue monitoring these youth after they complete detention and are released on probation. The population at the center averages about 70 youth, who typically remain at the facility for 22 to 30 days. The Probation Department currently supervises 392 juveniles at the center and on probation. Members of the staff, 125 in 2013, work with incarcerated youth and with those released on probation. The continuum of support from incarceration through diversion to home-supervised probation underscores the emphasis on rehabilitation and return to responsible living. An evaluation program is being instituted to measure the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions that the JJC has employed for several years.

Findings

- F1. Realignment continues to pose challenges to adult detention facilities.
- F2. Mandatory overtime is an increasing burden for correctional personnel.
- F3. Inmates with medical and mental health issues make significant demands on the MADF staff and facilities.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. The Sheriff's Office continue to improve the expansion and safety of adult detention facilities.
- R2. The Sheriff's Office keep up its efforts to hire new personnel to deal with the growing inmate population.
- R3. The Sheriff's Office continue treating inmates with mental and physical health issues to improve their chances for successful adjustment to independence upon release.

Required Responses

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

- R1, R2, R3 – Sonoma County Sheriff's Office
- R1, R2, R3 – Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

The governing body indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

Bibliography

California. Board of State and Community Corrections. *Training Manual*. 2013.

_____. Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Realignment Report. Office of Research. 2013.

_____. Public Policy Institute of California. *Public Safety Realignment and Crime Rates in California*. 2013.

Sonoma County. Community Corrections Partnership. *Assembly Bill 109/117 Recommended Public Safety Realignment Implementation Plan FY 2013-2014 (Year 3)*.

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