

MENDOCINO COUNTY JAIL, COURTHOUSE HOLDING CELLS AND SHERIFF'S EVIDENCE ROOM

May 24, 2007

Summary

The Grand Jury conducted its mandated annual visit to Mendocino County Jail (MCJ), Courthouse Holding Cells, and the Sheriff's Evidence Room. The facilities were found to be safe and well functioning.

Background

California Penal Code §919(b) states that "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the county."

Methods

The Mendocino County Grand Jury visited the MCJ facilities, the Courthouse Holding Cells, and the Sheriff's Evidence Room, and interviewed their respective supervisors and staff. Documents reviewed include State Fire Marshal's report, smoke detector inspections, three different Public Health inspection reports, Medical Quality Report, State Board of Corrections inspection, and a medical census report. The Grand Jury also inspected inmate complaints.

Findings

Mendocino County Jail

1. The MCJ present staff consists of 49 personnel:
 - one Captain;
 - three Sergeants;
 - eight Corporals;
 - 37 Correctional Officers;
 - five Sheriff Booking Technicians;
 - one Inmate Services Clerk who co-ordinates programs;
 - one Kitchen Manager and two cooks;
 - one Custodial Supervisor, who manages the laundry;
 - an Accounting Specialist for the commissary and inmate money accounts;
 - one Office Assistant II, who manages the jail records;
 - and three retired Officers who transport inmates to court, and do other duties as required.Eight of the staff are bilingual in Spanish.

2. The capacity of the Mendocino County jail is 305 inmates. At the time of the initial Grand Jury visit the population was 210 inmates. Temporary beds are available for those occasions when the jail's capacity is exceeded.
3. The Probation Department administers a program which reduces jail population by having adult offenders serve their sentence while remaining in the community, under the supervision of the probation department.
4. In 2006, one case of tuberculosis, 22 cases of sexually transmitted disease, and 46 cases of drug resistant staphylococcus were identified. There were 1,428 visits by the psychiatrist, 4,834 visits by the mental health nurse, and 262 dental visits.
5. The jail's menu, which rotates monthly, is prepared by a registered dietician.
6. Housing for male inmates consists of seven "units".
7. Women are housed separately, in two units.
8. Educational resources are available for inmates seeking to obtain a GED.
9. Programs which are available, include:
 - Addiction recovery programs, e.g. Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous;
 - Life skills;
 - Religious counseling.
10. A law library is available to inmates. Access requires good behavior; an appointment is necessary.
11. Inmates can send and receive mail. Incoming mail is opened and screened in front of the inmate and delivered the same day it is received. Outgoing mail is also screened.
12. Inappropriate mail is held and given to the inmate upon release.
13. A contracted phone company pays the Sheriff's Office an annual guaranteed amount of \$140,000 to be the service provider for the collect calls made from the jail. The money is used to support inmate services such as teachers, counseling, and exercise equipment.
14. Inmates who exhibit good behavior may work while in jail. Work opportunities include the kitchen, garden, laundry, and the work crew. The "work crew" provides labor anywhere in the County under supervision by Correctional Officers.
15. Inmates may have their sentence reduced for good behavior.
16. Doors and common areas are monitored by security cameras.
17. Correctional Officers work 12 hour shifts. There are a minimum of eight officers per shift.
18. Because of continuing maintenance problems, the County General Services Agency has assigned two full time personnel to the MCJ.
19. Most inmates are either directly or indirectly incarcerated as a result of drugs and/or alcohol.
20. Cells are either single, double, or triple occupancy, or barracks style.
21. Inmates in lockdown are allowed out of their cells 30 minutes per day.
22. All inmates are allowed exercise privileges.

Mendocino County Courthouse Holding Cells

23. The four Courthouse Holding Cells, which are used to hold prisoners awaiting court hearings, were observed to be clean and in good working order.

Mendocino County Sheriff's Evidence Room

24. The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office central evidence facility, located in Ukiah, is the depository for most evidence collected from crime scenes.
25. Budgeted staff consists of one and one-half positions.
26. This facility also processes evidence such as fingerprints, shoe prints, tire treads, etc. Some evidence is sent for testing to outside facilities.
27. Evidence Room personnel strictly control all evidence. This fulfills the need for a "Chain of Evidence" necessary for criminal prosecutions.
28. Evidence at this facility must be maintained until, by court order, it can be disposed of; or is released by the District Attorney's Office.
29. Evidence Room operations, including purging and disposition of evidence, require greater staff time than is presently available.
30. The Evidence Room requires refrigeration for certain evidence. At present, their refrigeration capacity is aging and insufficient.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. funds be provided for the purchase of new refrigeration equipment to suit the Evidence Room requirement. (Findings 28, 30)
2. additional staff be provided for Evidence Room operations. (Findings 25, 27, 29)

Comments

The Grand Jury commends the staff of the Mendocino County Jail, and the General Services Agency, for the tremendous work they do in maintaining a safe and functional environment for the staff and inmates.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)
Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer (All Findings; All Recommendations)
Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)