

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2019-2020



JAILS AND JUVENILE TREATMENT CENTER INSPECTIONS

CASE 19-08 • JUNE 8, 2020

Public Release

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BACKGROUND

California Penal Code Section 919(b) mandates "*The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the County.*" The Grand Jury has historically inspected County jails and the Juvenile Treatment Center.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews

- Facility sworn and unsworn personnel, inmates, and wards (juvenile offenders)

Document Review

- Guidelines from Detention Facility Inspection Form
- The Board of State and Community Corrections Jails Inspection Handbook

Site Visits

- El Dorado County Jail in South Lake Tahoe
- El Dorado County Jail in Placerville
- El Dorado County Juvenile Treatment Center in South Lake Tahoe

DISCUSSION

Both Jails

Inspections of both jails included inmate housing, holding cells, medical units, culinary facilities, indoor gym recreation facilities, library and classrooms. Various control rooms throughout the facility monitor the housing units, along with the main control room which monitors the entire facility inside and out. We also inspected the booking/intake area, public access area, isolation cells, and the sally port, which is a secure entrance where inmates are brought into the jail and processed.

Historically, County jails served as pretrial detention centers and housed criminals usually sentenced to no more than one year. They were not designed to house prisoners serving long-term or life sentences. Instead, those convicted of more serious crimes, and subject to longer sentences, were sent to state prison.

In 2011, the Public Safety Realignment Act (AB-109), reduced California's overcrowded prison system by moving lower level offenders to county jails. Consequently, counties became financially responsible for incarceration, parole, parole revocation and all ancillary services related to long-term incarceration.

Each inmate is classified to determine the housing unit where they will be assigned. Housing units, referred to as pods, house inmates depending on each inmate's ability to associate with others. Some inmates are housed in isolation based on their criminal charges, combativeness, gang affiliations, mental state, and other issues that would make them a danger to others, or others a danger to them. These inmates do not have direct contact with other inmates at any time. Rival gang members are not housed together. Informants and inmates charged with sexual misconduct against minors are housed separate from the general population which consists of inmates charged with theft, battery, assault, burglary, drugs, and lesser violent crimes. Many inmates have mental health problems but are not segregated unless a safety and/or behavioral issue arises.

Officers monitor all inmates from the control rooms 24 hours a day. Each control room contains monitors showing all activity in each pod. Officers can give inmates direction, such as when to come out of their cells for mealtime, exercise, court appointments, visitation, and when to return to their cells.

The El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE) offers a range of educational classes at both facilities including court-ordered narcotics, alcohol and anger abuse management. Some inmates have completed General Educational Development (GED) requirements, giving them an alternative to a high school diploma.

Both jails offer vocational programs in wastewater treatment and culinary skills. Both programs provide job skills for inmates when they are released. The wastewater treatment plant vocational program is an independent study program provided through EDCOE.

The culinary programs at both jails have received numerous awards. To participate in the culinary program, inmates must complete a Food Safety class. Inmates prepare meals that are served to the inmates and staff daily. In addition, inmates have prepared many meals served at a variety of County functions. Violent inmates cannot participate in the culinary program. Those who do participate are proud to be a part of it.

Culinary workers are organized into teams of six. Male and female inmates are not allowed to come together and until recently, only male inmates participated in the program. This year several female inmates from the Placerville jail transferred to South Lake Tahoe to join with other women to make one team of female participants.

A civilian staff cook oversees the day-to-day operations and management of the kitchens and inmates. A registered dietitian reviews all menus and meal plans. The goal is to provide three meals per day, two of which are hot. When a lockdown is in place, kitchen staff provide a bagged meal.

Our inspection found the kitchens very hygienic. The floors were clean and smelled of disinfectant. The fans and vents appeared clean and free of grease and grime. Food preparation areas, sinks, and storage areas were sanitary and tidy. Freezers, refrigerators, and food storage areas were well maintained and organized. Cleaning fluids and other chemicals were properly labeled and safely stored. Knives and other sharp instruments are counted and locked up when not in use.

Inmates have numerous activities they may participate in. Inmates can attend religious services of their preferred denomination and can request a visit from their clergy. Inmates at both facilities exercise in an indoor yard for one hour two to three times per week. Computer tablets are available for inmates use when pursuing educational options. They are extremely popular; there are not enough tablets for everyone so inmates must share them. Tablets are a privilege so good behavior is necessary to use them. Tablets avail the inmates to educational benefits and reading material.

Wellpath, an independent medical provider used at many jails throughout the State, contracts with the County to provide services to inmates. A Registered Nurse works at the jail during the day and a Licensed Vocational Nurse at night. Psychiatric/Psychological services are also available. The medical facility, although small, appeared orderly, neat, and well maintained.

South Lake Tahoe Jail

The 47-year-old facility has been expanded to 158-beds. At the time of our inspection it was at 80 percent occupancy with 119 male and 16 female inmates. Approximately 20 percent of the inmates in the South Lake Tahoe jail are AB-109 Public Safety Realignment inmates.

A full body metal detector in the lobby was fully functional and in use. The facility was clean and odor-free. Other than water stains on ceiling tiles, the facility seemed to be in overall good condition. Interior walls were clean and free of graffiti and floors, drains, and plumbing fixtures were all in proper working order.

Grand Jurors interviewed one female and three male inmates. Topics included food, availability of religious services, library services, medical services, and educational opportunities within the jail. The inmates had positive comments about the facility and staff. They also reported that the food is outstanding. A kitchen worker was extremely happy and positive a job was waiting upon release.

Placerville Jail

The 32-year-old jail in Placerville is a 303-bed facility with 198 male and 37 female inmates at the time of our inspection. Since the 2017-2018 Grand Jury's inspection, no inmates have committed suicide, although there have been three attempts.

A full body metal detector in the lobby was fully functional and in operation. The facility appeared extremely clean and in good condition; there was no visible graffiti. Inmates paint the jail interior twice a year.

We spoke with four inmates. All expressed positive views about food, health care, staff, education benefits, the culinary and educational programs.

Future plans include the construction of a new facility adjacent to the existing jail. It will include multi-use space, medical beds and mental health services. There will also be two female housing units with 54 beds.

Juvenile Treatment Center

The South Lake Tahoe Juvenile Treatment Center (JTC) is a 40-bed facility. Staff ensure that wards' physical and mental health needs are met. It also contracts with *Wellpath* having a registered nurse on duty six mornings per week Monday through Saturday mornings for medication pass and sick call. A nurse practitioner makes rounds once a week. A full-time mental health program coordinator, licensed therapist, psychiatrist and other medical staff provide mental health care.

Daily educational classes with books and tablets allow teachers to help students to maintain their individual educational goals. The quiet classroom appeared neat, orderly, and peaceful. Positive inspirational quotes on the walls, pictures of nature and other colorful posters surrounded the classroom, contributing to a positive learning environment.

Eight male and two female wards were interviewed. They expressed positive attitudes toward staff, satisfaction with services provided, and optimistic outlook views for their futures. Favorable comments were made about food, library, books, sick call and educational opportunity provided them.

Future Juvenile Treatment Center Plans

A new 20-bed Juvenile Center, housing all County wards, will be constructed at the Placerville County Government Center on the site of the previous Sheriff's Department headquarters. A \$9.6 million State construction grant will pay most of the cost. The Board of Supervisors also directed the formation of recommendations for continued use of the JTC building in South Lake Tahoe, after the newly constructed Placerville facility opens in 2021.

FINDINGS

Jails

- F1. Metal detectors are fully functional and in use at both facilities.
- F2. Both County jails were found to be adequately maintained and functioning properly.
- F3. The culinary program continues to be a success.
- F4. There are insufficient tablets available for all prisoners.

Juvenile Treatment Center

- F5. Needs of wards are successfully being met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury has no recommendations.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

This Grand Jury report is an account of an investigation or review. It contains findings and recommendations, and names those who should respond to each finding and each recommendation pertaining to matters under the respondent's control.

Please review *Responding to a Grand Jury Report*, a separate document included with this report.

Responses are requested in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05.

Response to F4 is required from the El Dorado County Sheriff.

Response to F5 is invited from the El Dorado County Chief Probation Officer.