

EL DORADO COUNTY  
2015-2016 GRAND JURY  
REPORT



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EL DORADO COUNTY  
JAILS INSPECTION

CASE 15-11 • JUNE 9, 2016

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Public Release  
JUNE 24, 2016

# EL DORADO COUNTY 2015-2016 GRAND JURY

## *EL DORADO COUNTY JAILS INSPECTION*

Case 15-11 • June 2, 2016

The Grand Jury is authorized to visit and inquire into the conditions of any public prison within the county, including county jails, as outlined in Section 919 (b) of the California Penal Code. Inspecting safety and security in jails are priorities along with ensuring inmates are treated in a safe and humane manner. The California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) is the state regulatory agency that establishes and oversees standards for the construction, operation and administration of county detention facilities.

A jail is defined as a locked adult detention facility which holds both arrested, non-sentenced and convicted adult criminal offenders. This report is about the grand jury inspection of the El Dorado County jails.

### **BACKGROUND**

The jails in El Dorado County, located in South Lake Tahoe (SLT) and Placerville, are older facilities. The SLT jail was originally constructed in 1973 with additions and modifications throughout the 1980's. Inmate population is usually near its capacity of 158. The Placerville jail, constructed in 1988, also has an inmate population close to its capacity of 311. The 2013-2014 grand jury recommended both jails be evaluated for replacement or refurbishment because of their age and an increasingly older jail population.

### **METHODOLOGY**

- Reviewed past grand jury reports
- Reviewed the latest BSCC Inspection report
- Reviewed the fire plan
- Reviewed the dietary plan
- Reviewed the policy and procedure manual
- Reviewed sample of inmate grievances and incident reports
- Interviewed jail administration, jail staff and inmates

## DISCUSSION

The jail staff told the grand jury that Assembly Bill (AB109) "2011 Public Safety Realignment", has caused many convicted criminals who would previously have been housed in state prisons to serve their time in county facilities. As a result, the general inmate population is more sophisticated and dangerous than in the past. County jail inmates can now be incarcerated for decades, rather than the previous one-year maximum sentence. This has created an older and more dangerous county jail population, who frequently develop relationships with other inmates, causing more possibilities for concentrated anger against guards of other inmates.

California State Proposition 47 for "Safe Neighborhoods and Schools" has resulted in reclassifying many drug offenses that were once felonies to misdemeanors, sending offenders to county jail rather than state prison, which, again, exacerbates the county jail population.

Realignment (AB109) was established by the Executive Committee of Community Corrections Partnership for necessary changes in the prison population. The Partnership presented local plans to the Board of Supervisors and then assisted with their implementation.

Staff commented that the jail is emerging as a mental health facility in addition to a jail for criminal incarceration due to the increased number of inmates who require mental health services. They also commented that there are more drugs smuggled into the jail and that there are more violent offenders than in the past. Another negative impact from realignment is an aging inmate population requiring elder services — going from a medical services acute care model to long-term care.

In past years, the El Dorado County jails were frequently able to accommodate inmates from other neighboring counties for a fee. This was financially beneficial to the Sheriff's budget and the county. Realignment effectively eliminated the ability to house a significant number of non-El Dorado County inmates.

The jails were built for fewer, and less violent prisoners than we currently have. Realignment has caused prisoners who previously would have been in state prisons to be in county jails. This has affected not only the numbers of prisoners but the type of prisoners – more hardened criminals, recidivists, members of prison affiliations and low level criminals with few connections with each other.

Also, the jails were designed for shorter stays. As more felons spend longer periods there, there are more jail relationships generating a need for different spaces (more segregated areas for example). Inmates are housed longer having more medical needs. The jails were also built before there were as many incarcerated mentally ill patients.

## PLACERVILLE JAIL INSPECTION

The Placerville tour started in the booking intake area to help the grand jury become acquainted with the intake process, health screening and steps an inmate would go through when entering the facility. The well-maintained exterior and interior conditions were noted. The grounds, exercise areas, cells and dining areas were inspected. Safety and security issues were discussed with the jail staff. Staff also reported there was a lack of permanent beds.

Inmates are scanned with a metal detector before admittance and when leaving. Inmates are given a hygiene kit at intake and must shower and dress in jail clothing before being admitted to the general population area where detainees have access to washer and dryer machines. When moving from one area to another, inmates must follow the *black line* on the floor. Medical cells are available for inmates requiring care and medical supervision. California law requires that all inmates be allowed to exercise three hours a week in the *yard*. It also requires that detainees must be allowed one phone call within three hours of booking.

The jail is organized into areas called *Pods*. A pod is a group of cells configured around a central common area having surveillance monitors that allows corrections officers to observe inmate behavior remotely. Staff tries to minimize disturbances within the pods; inmates are grouped into a pod based upon their penchant for good behavior, gang affiliation, or sexual predilection.

The jail has behavior modification programs designed to help inmates that may not have had *normal* family bonding, home life, or educational experiences. Jail programs include Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, educational programs, and various religious groups. A full service kitchen is staffed by inmates supervised by jail staff. Medical staff are on site Monday through Friday from 8:30-4:30 with X-ray services available once a week. A general concern of staff was the previously mentioned need for additional mental health services.

There are not enough beds for the jail population as it fluctuates. While in jail parlance beds frequently mean cells, here it is not that there is insufficient cell space, but rather a lack of adequate furnishings. They have resorted to using temporary or makeshift beds that, because of their appearance, are called *boats*.

## SOUTH LAKE TAHOE JAIL INSPECTION

The SLT inspection started in the visitor's lobby. The reception area renovation is a part of budgeted improvements that will, in phases, include the booking area and remote module control area that oversees access to locked areas within the jail. The jail capacity is 158; the current population was 127 with 105 males and 22 females. Staff morale is reportedly good. There were nine staff vacancies during our visit. Staff retention is reportedly a challenge because of lower than competitive salaries, retirement of staff, firings, transfers and difficulty of staff to acclimate to a colder high altitude environment. Currently, recruitment efforts are targeting certain positions, yet some vacancies are not filled to stay within budget.

The jail tour took us through the module control unit where remote surveillance monitors oversee eleven inmate pods, similar to Placerville pods, the kitchen area and points of entry.

The current budget addresses several immediate concerns. In the coming months, plans include employing body cameras on the correction officers. Forty additional cameras are planned to be installed throughout the facility, especially in housing areas. Additional security upgrades are needed in the kitchen and laundry and the outside doors. While security perimeter fencing is a concern, changes cannot be effected because of Tahoe Regional Planning Agency restrictions.

The grand jury discussed programs with inmates that included substance abuse, life skills, General Education Development Test (GED), education, and religious services. Inmates would like more library books, greater access to the internet, games and stationery. The inmates were generally complimentary of the food, though some would like larger portions.

Inmate services discussed with staff included adult education including GED, English as a second language education and adult enrichment career counseling. HEARTS — a court-ordered addiction recovery program and plan for sobriety has twenty-four classes offered twice weekly for 12 weeks. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overcomers Outreach, HIV and Infectious diseases education and prevention are other programs that are available.

Attorney-client privilege and confidentiality is available in a room provided for that purpose. Plans are for three legal research computer stations for inmate use having Lexis Advance®, a legal search engine.

An improved *safety cell* is necessary for inmates who need greater monitoring. Converting an existing cell into an improved safety cell will cost \$50,000.

The civilian kitchen supervisor oversees a culinary arts program where inmates can earn college credits through the local community college. Inmates can become *Serve Safe* certified after 500 hours and receive 14 college credits. Four inmate cooks prepare meals three times daily for both staff and inmates. The rising costs of the most basic food items make the kitchen budget a challenge. For example, the price of a case of 15 dozen eggs has increased from \$30.00 to \$90.00. The cooks create their own menus to cut costs where they can.

## FINDINGS

- F1. An aging and longer term inmate population requires a different type medical care model.
- F2. More sophisticated criminals with gang affiliations and inmates exhibiting increased mental health issues are challenging to jail staff.
- F3. The Placerville Jail is in need of more permanent beds (furniture, not cells).
- F4. An improved safety cell is needed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. Conversion of a regular cell into a safety cell will provide a higher level of care for mental health inmates at SLT.
- R2. There is a need to buy and install more beds in the Placerville jail.

## REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Responses to both findings and recommendations in this report are required by law in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05 from the El Dorado County Sheriff on or before August 23, 2016

Address responses to:

The Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury  
Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court  
1354 Johnson Blvd.  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

The Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court additionally requests that responses be sent electronically as a *Word* or *PDF* file to facilitate the economical and timely distribution of such responses. Please email responses to El Dorado County Grand Jury reports to: [courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org](mailto:courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org).

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 name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.