

THE STATE OF ORANGE COUNTY JAILS

SUMMARY

California Penal Code §919(b) mandates that the Grand Jury inquire into the state of all jails (county and city), holding cells and other detention facilities, including juvenile, located in the county and issue comments based on the findings of these inquiries. Of the 37 jails, holding cells or other detention facilities identified in Orange County, 29 (78 percent) were visited by the 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury. The majority of these inspections was unannounced.

The results of these visits showed that there remains a continuing problem of overcrowding in many of the Sheriff-Coroner-operated facilities as well as a shortage of temporary holding facilities in the County's Sheriff-Coroner Department contract cities. The Grand Jury also found that the lack of a Registered Nurse on evenings and weekends was a problem if an inmate needed medical assistance or prescription-drug administration at the Los Piños Conservation Camp, a remote juvenile facility located east of San Juan Capistrano.

The 16 city jails visited met California State Department of Corrections standards, were adequately staffed and well maintained. All visits to city jails were unannounced.

INTRODUCTION

All jails, holding cells or other detention facilities located in Orange County are operated under the authority of three categories of agencies. They are the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department, the Orange County Probation Department (juvenile) or one of 22 city police departments that maintain jail facilities. Most of the jails operated by city police departments are short-term holding facilities that hold prisoners for six hours or less. The prisoners are either cited and released or transported to one of the long-term jail facilities operated by the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department.

The jails were inspected by the Grand Jury using a standard set of questions relating to staffing, operations, security and inmate welfare. The Grand Jury found, without exception, that jail operations personnel, both county and city, were professional, interested in the welfare of the inmates, helpful and cooperative during these visits.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury made appointments to visit the large jails and other types of holding facilities operated by the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department and the Orange County Probation Department (juvenile). This prior notice was necessary due to the complex security requirements of these large facilities. The Grand Jury also inquired into the state of holding facilities at the several cities in Orange County that contract with the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department for city police services. The 16 city police department jails and three justice center holding cells were visited unannounced. Each facility was inspected using a checklist of questions that the Grand Jury developed to learn more about the quality of jail staff, inmate rights and welfare (including medical), security and operational problems. It is to the city jail staff's credit that in every case, even though they were not expecting the visit, they showed exceptional professionalism in conducting the tours for the Grand Jury.

DISCUSSION

Orange County Sheriff-Coroner-Operated Jail Facilities, Holding Cells and Medical Detention Facilities

The Grand Jury visited the Orange County Central Men's Jail, Orange County Central Women's Jail, the Intake and Release Facility, Theo Lacy Jail, James A. Musick Correctional Facility, Western Medical Center Detention Facility and the holding cells of the Central Justice Center, Harbor Justice Center and West Justice Center.

The Grand Jury found that the holding cells at the Central Justice Center can be very busy on certain days, and overcrowded conditions existed due to lack of space on the day the Grand Jury visited. The Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department deputies on duty were doing an outstanding job of managing the situation during the visit. The deputies must classify inmates arriving for court hearings based on gang membership, ethnicity or other factors in order to prevent violent confrontations during their short stay at the Central Justice Center. Finding space to separate potentially dangerous inmates can be very difficult, but it is necessary to prevent injury to inmates as well as deputies.

The 2002-2003 Orange County Grand Jury conducted an in-depth study of overcrowded conditions in the jails operated by the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department. Their report showed that the county jail system operated at an average of 121 percent of (21 percent over) its state-approved capacity. At the time the report was released, the county jail system had a total of 4,133 beds available for housing inmates. Since that time, 384 new beds have been added through new facility construction, bringing the total number of beds in the system to 4,517. Even with this increased capacity, the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department's jail system operated at an average of 117 percent of (17 percent over) state-approved capacity in 2003.

In response to last year's Grand Jury report, the Sheriff-Coroner agreed to continue the pursuit of compliance with State standards and to address the projected growth of the inmate population by planning for the addition of new jail-bed capacity. With final build-out of the Theo Lacy Jail, expected by early 2005, the Sheriff-Coroner Department has begun the planning process for new jail beds at the James A. Musick Correctional Facility. The Orange County Board of Supervisors approved \$2.5 million in the fiscal year 2003-2004 budget for development of a master plan for the Musick facility. The Sheriff-Coroner Department anticipates that the Board of Supervisors will select an architect-engineer firm for the project by the end of 2004. In the interim, overcrowding continues to be a problem in the county jail system.

The Grand Jury intended to inquire into the state of secure holding facilities at the 12 cities that contract for police services with the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department. They found that there are none. When one of these departments makes an arrest that requires detention, the detainee must be transported by car, individually or with a small number of other detainees, up to 40 miles one-way, to be housed in one of the Orange County Central jails. The Grand Jury is of the opinion that a facility for temporary detention needs to be located in southern Orange County where prisoners could be detained until a sufficient number is reached to transport by bus or van. A savings in fuel costs and more efficient manpower utilization would thus be realized.

Orange County Probation Department-Operated Juvenile Detention Facilities

The Grand Jury visited the Orange County Juvenile Hall, the Joplin Youth Center, the Youth Guidance Center, the Theo Lacy Juvenile Annex and the Los Piños Conservation Camp. As a result of the visits, the Grand Jury learned that Orange County's five juvenile detention facilities can currently accommodate 804 youths and that by 2010 the county will require 1,500 more beds.

Juvenile Hall has a 434-bed capacity and houses juveniles whose offenses range from theft to murder. In July 2003, the population of wards was 348, reflecting the usual pattern of fewer juveniles in residence in summer months. The staff-to-ward ratio is one staff member for every 10 juveniles at this facility. The Grand Jury found that the Probation Department Administration places a high priority on education. The wards are given the opportunity to earn high school diplomas or high school equivalency certificates while in custody.

The Grand Jury visited the Los Piños Conservation Camp, a 52-acre wooded facility that houses up to 125 male juveniles, ages 16 to 18. Most of the wards at this facility have extensive criminal records but have earned the right to be placed in this facility through good behavior. The staff emphasizes instilling four core values in their charges: self-discipline, self-esteem, self-worth and trust.

A concern of the Grand Jury is the lack of the availability of a Registered Nurse during evenings and weekends at Los Piños. When medical emergencies occur during these times, the wards are driven to a hospital south of Lake Elsinore, 15-20 miles from the camp. The Grand Jury feels that a Registered Nurse should be available at all times to handle most, if not all, medical problems and to administer prescription drugs.

The Grand Jury appreciates the courtesy and dedication shown by the Probation Department staff at each of the facilities visited.

Although not in Orange County, the California Youth Authority in Whittier was visited by the Grand Jury. During the half-day tour, the Grand Jury had the opportunity to speak to juveniles from Orange County. The facility has a number of excellent programs for its wards.

City-Operated Jails

The Grand Jury visited 16 city police department jails or detention facilities. The jails operated by the police departments of the cities of Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, La Habra, Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, Orange, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Tustin and Westminster were inspected. Each was scrutinized using a standard checklist of questions relating to staffing adequacy, operations and procedures, security and inmate health and welfare. All 16 visits were unannounced. All jails visited were adequately staffed, maintained and, in each case, found to be in compliance with California State Department of Corrections standards.

The circumstances of an unannounced visit added more stress to an already stressful environment. The Grand Jury appreciates the courtesy shown it by each of the cities jail staff.

FINDINGS

Under *California Penal Code* §933 and §933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury arrived at the following findings:

1. The jail facilities operated by the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department continue to suffer from overcrowded conditions.
2. There are insufficient short-term holding facilities for arrestees awaiting transport from the several Orange County Sheriff-Coroner contract cities to Orange County Central Jail. Arrestees must be transported individually or in small numbers up to 40 miles one-way.
3. Registered Nurses are unavailable evenings and weekends at the Los Piños Conservation Camp, a remotely located facility for juveniles. This requires transport of ill or injured wards to a hospital 15-20 miles away in Riverside County.

Responses to Findings 1-3 are required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

Responses to Findings 1 and 2 are required from the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner.

A response to Finding 3 is requested from the Orange County Probation Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* §933 and §933.05, each recommendation requires a response from the government entity to which it is addressed. These recommendations are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based upon the findings, the 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The Orange County Sheriff-Coroner continue to diligently pursue compliance with State standards and to address the projected growth of the inmate population by planning for the addition of jail beds. (Finding 1)

2. The Orange County Sheriff-Coroner locate a suitable site to construct a secure detention facility for the short-term housing of inmates to eliminate the need to transport individuals or small numbers of inmates long distances from the point of arrest to the Orange County Central Jail complex in Santa Ana. (Finding 2)
3. The Orange County Probation Department take steps to place a full-time Registered Nurse, including evenings and weekends, in its Los Piños Conservation Camp. (Finding 3)

Responses are required to Recommendations 1-3 from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

Responses are required to Recommendations 1 and 2 from the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner.

A response is requested to Recommendation 3 from the Orange County Probation Department.