

# THE JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER

## Background/Summary

California Penal Code § 925 authorizes the Grand Jury to investigate and report on the operations of the officers, departments, or functions of the county, including the Juvenile Detention Center.

The Grand Jury is pleased to note that Placer County operates a modern facility to house juvenile delinquents in a detention center, with significant additional capacity to meet the needs of a fast growing youth population in the county. The facility, which opened in March 2000, meets all state and federal requirements related to the physical aspects of juvenile detention facilities, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The 2000-2001 Grand Jury inspected the facility in October 2000 and again in February 2001. While the new Center has facilities and equipment to provide much more than detention services, such as recreation services, classrooms, and counseling areas, the Grand Jury concluded that the transition to the new building has created new challenges for management related to the assignment and allocation of staff throughout the facility.

In addition, the Grand Jury is concerned that,

- opportunities for juveniles to harm themselves noted in last year's report still exist,
- several sources reported that senior management of the Probation Department has not been consistently responsive to staff needs, and
- there is a lack of beds and staffing to accommodate juveniles with mental health issues in Placer County.

## Discussion

The Juvenile Detention Center Director provided a tour of the facility to the 2000-2001 Grand Jury on October 24th, 2000. The director appeared informed, capable and cordial to staff as well as to the juveniles at the facility. In addition, the Grand Jury met with the Deputy Chief of Probation and the Center Director on February 20, 2001, and the Chief Probation Officer on March 8, 2001.

The Grand Jury noted that the Probation Department has implemented some of the recommendations of the 1999-2000 Grand Jury, such as installing razor wire atop outside fences. However, recommendations to (1) provide a means of electronically controlling outer doors from a secure central location to facilitate emergency evacuations and (2) reduce the risks of open railings on stairways and an easily accessible electrical control panel on a handicapped lift have not been addressed.

Placer County, as other parts of the State, is experiencing a rapid increase in youth population. The Juvenile Detention Center houses children under the age of 18 years, with the youngest ever reported being nine years of age. The average daily caseload in October 2000 was reported as 40 youth, with a maximum capacity for 76. The facility also provides placement for out-of-county youth. There were seven at the time of the October 24, 2000 Grand Jury visit.

The Grand Jury reviewed staffing and services to youth in the Center. While the Chief Probation Officer and Deputy Chief of Probation declared that current staffing is compliant with California Code of Regulations Title 15, Crime Prevention and Corrections, the staffing level does not allow comprehensive evaluation of youthful offenders and their families as a prerequisite for overall case management. In addition, on at least one occasion, the facility was left without a female staff member on duty when a scheduled staff member left before the end of her shift. According to testimony heard by the Grand Jury, management was unable to find someone to fill in on short notice in that instance.

The Grand Jury received several complaints regarding senior management's lack of response to employee concerns, inadequate staffing to supervise youth at the facility at all times and failure to authorize the use of pepper spray for self-defense. Staff has repeatedly requested the authority to carry pepper spray, which has been determined to be an effective control at other juvenile detention facilities. The 1997-1998 Grand Jury also recommended the Probation Department authorize the use of pepper spray for use by staff. Probation Department employees have already received some training in the proper use of the spray. The Probation Department stated that a draft policy is undergoing legal review, the final step before implementation.

While Placer County has a variety of programs to serve youthful offenders, there is an urgent need to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for treatment and management of mental health and substance abuse problems using a community-based family-centered approach. Current juvenile offenders with mental health problems must be sent out of Placer County for housing and treatment.

## **Finding 1**

The external doors at the Juvenile Detention Center are secured with manual locks and keys, which creates the potential for delay in the event of emergency evacuations.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer disagree partially with the finding. The external doors of the Juvenile Detention Facility are secured with manual locks; however, we agree with the evaluation and assessment of the Chief Probation Officer that adequate controls are in place to ensure rapid evacuation from the Facility in case of emergency, and that manual external door locks will not impede evacuation.***

## **Recommendation 1**

Institute measures to allow quick, safe exit from the building in the event of life threatening emergencies, maintaining the safety and security of inmates, staff and the public at all times.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer believe that the recommendation has been implemented.***
- ***As indicated in the response from the Chief Probation Officer and the Director of the Juvenile Detention Facility, each lock on the cell doors may be released electronically from the central control unit (internal cell locks). This allows an orderly evacuation of juveniles and staff from the Facility according to the County approved fire evacuation plan. In addition, fire drills are conducted on a regular basis to test the fire evacuation plan and the functional performance of the Facility.***

## **Finding 2**

As noted in last year's Grand Jury report, certain aspects of the facility's construction may allow juveniles to harm themselves or others. Stairways have open railings. The handicapped lift has an easily accessed electrical control panel.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer disagree partially with the finding. The stairways have a clear, Plexiglas shield or barrier attached to the railing and although the power supply and control unit for the handicap lift may be accessible due to its location, it would be difficult to operate the lift due to other security measures.***

## **Recommendation 2**

Find ways to reduce or mitigate these risks.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer believe that the recommendation has been implemented.***

- ***The stairways of the Facility include installation of clear Plexiglas that is vertical to the handrails. This creates a safety barrier to reduce accidents or opportunities of harm by juveniles to themselves or to staff. The power supply for the handicap lift is accessible due to its location; however, the power supply lever is locked in the off position by a padlock and the controls to operate the unit requires a separate key to operate the lift. These security measures make it difficult for juveniles to access the operation of the lift.. The responses of the Chief Probation Officer and the Director of the Detention Facility are also attached to this response.***

### **Finding 3**

While staffing levels meet the minimum requirements of California Code of Regulations Title 15, Crime Prevention and Corrections, they have not been adequate to ensure complete coverage of the facility's needs at all times

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer disagree partially with the finding. The Juvenile Detention Facility maintains a staffing ratio in compliance with State Regulations.***

### **Recommendation 3**

Juvenile Detention Center management should conduct an immediate analysis of staffing levels and male/female demographics in relation to the physical plant to ensure full-time, part-time and on-call staff are adequate at all times to meet the needs of youth housed in the facility.

- ***The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.***
- ***The Chief Probation Officer has been directed to conduct a staffing study of the Juvenile Detention Center and submit a written report that includes findings and recommendations to the County Executive Officer by November 2001. In addition, the County has hired a consultant to perform an independent review of the operations of the Detention Facility. The new Juvenile Detention Center became operational in March of 2000, replacing an older, smaller, and less efficient facility. Although the staffing plan of the new Center complies with legal requirements based on the number of juveniles that may be detained, a review of the actual operating experience of the new facility and its impact on the security and the welfare of juveniles is in order. The responses of the Chief Probation Officer and the Director of the Detention Facility are included with this response.***

## **Finding 4**

Juvenile Detention Center staff are not currently authorized to carry pepper spray as a defensive tool.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive agree with the finding.***

## **Recommendation 4**

The Grand Jury recommends that the draft policy authorizing the use of pepper spray by appropriately trained staff be approved and implemented as soon as possible.

- ***The recommendation has not yet been implemented but it is expected to be implemented in the near future.***
- ***As indicated in the response of the Chief Probation Officer and the Director of the Juvenile Detention Center, the use of pepper spray within the Center will be implemented. The policy on the use of the spray has been developed and approved, and all staff have received proper training including a training update on August 23, 2001.***

## **Finding 5**

There is no inpatient treatment facility in Placer County for youth with mental health problems.

- ***The Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer agree with the finding.***

## **Recommendation 5**

The Grand Jury recommends that the Probation Department contract with appropriate institutions within Placer County to provide family centered services for children and youth under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court who need residential treatment services for mental health problems.

The Placer County Board of Supervisors should work to designate a facility within Placer County that meets these needs.

- ***The recommendation will not be implemented because there are no residential treatment centers in Placer County to serve juveniles with mental health problems at the present time.***
- ***This issue is also a statewide problem that affects all counties including***

***Placer County. However, as indicated in the response from the Chief Probation Officer, juveniles with mental health problems that are under the jurisdiction of the Court may be placed in residential treatment centers in other jurisdictions. Although it may be more convenient and beneficial for treatment purposes to have a local service provider, it is equally important that the service be available regardless of its location. In addition, the County Executive Office will continue to work with the Chief Probation Officer and the Director of Health and Human Services to identify and respond to the needs of juveniles with mental health problems, including opportunities for local treatment.***

## **Respondents**

Placer County Board of Supervisors  
Placer County Chief Probation Officer  
Placer County Executive Officer  
Placer County Juvenile Detention Center Director