

Review of the Santa Cruz County Main Jail

Background

The Santa Cruz County Main Jail is located on Water Street in the City of Santa Cruz. The Main Jail is a maximum and medium security facility, with a rated capacity of 311 inmates. The inmates are either un-sentenced (awaiting trial, in trial, awaiting sentencing) awaiting transport to a State or Federal prison, or serving sentences of up to one year. The Jail population is primarily male; the majority of female inmates are housed in the Blaine Street Jail, a minimum-security women's facility.

Because of their low number, violent or high-risk female inmates requiring medium or maximum security are housed in a separate section of the Main Jail segregated from male inmates. The Main Jail is the booking center for all of Santa Cruz County. Each city pays booking fees to the county. These fees are reimbursed by the State. The primary goals of the Main Jail are safety and security, for both staff and inmates.

Findings

1. At the time of the Grand Jury reviews, August 9, 2002 and Feb 7, 2003:
 - The facility was exceptionally clean and well maintained.
 - The staff was very professional and at each level was able to provide immediate, detailed answers to questions posed by Grand Jurors.
 - The facility appeared well organized and the staff well versed in operational policies, rules and procedures.
2. At the time of the February 7th Grand Jury visit the inmate population was 359, in a facility with a rated capacity of 311. Approximately two thirds of those incarcerated were un-sentenced. According to staff, the Main Jail population varies but is generally over capacity.
3. Approximately 13,000 to 15,000 individuals are arrested and processed each year. According to staff:
 - 90% are male
 - 80% are repeat offenders
 - 80% are substance abusers
 - 25% suffer from some form of mental illness
 - 90% of repeat offenders will average a total of seven jail or prison terms
 - 80% of individuals booked are released on their own recognizance, or on bail, pending disposition of charges
4. According to senior Jail staff, the statistics in Finding 3 are anecdotal because the Sheriff's Department has very limited electronic means to produce statistical data.

(See Appendix below.) Conversely, law enforcement in the City of Watsonville uses a very comprehensive system of tabulation and analysis. The Watsonville system was demonstrated for members of the Grand Jury.

5. The present cost of the booking process is \$118 per arrestee.
6. The busiest time of year for arrests is summer, when the number of individuals booked ranges from 30 to 80 per day. The number booked ranges from 20 to 30 during the rest of the year.
7. The booking process includes:
 - detoxification (if needed) with restraint (if needed)
 - fingerprinting and 'mug' photo
 - cataloging and retention of personal effects
 - a visual 'strip' search for weapons and drugs
 - showering and decontamination
 - issuing of jail garb
 - a health screening
8. After booking, the housing requirement for each individual is determined by classification according to stipulated criteria:
 - gender, transgender
 - age
 - physical, medical and mental state**
 - risk of violence -- from others and to others
 - nature of charge(s)
 - potential for escape
9. Experience, skill and judgment in classifying inmates is crucial to maintaining safety and security, for example:
 - identifying and separating members of rival gangs or other hostile factions is necessary
 - homosexual, transgender or individuals charged with physical crimes against children may be targets for attack
 - some inmates are suicidal, or become suicidal once confined
 - mentally ill inmates can be perpetrators or targets of violence
10. Mental state is an assessment based on behavior. There are no on-site qualified professionals at the Jail for psychological evaluation.

** Mental state is an assessment based on behavior, no clinical evaluation is performed.

11. The total cost (jail overhead, staffing, equipment, etc.) to house an inmate was approximately \$72 per day at the time of the Grand Jury review.
12. The County operates a Work Release Program, administered from the Main Jail, intended to provide selected, minimum-security inmates with a means of transition from incarceration to gainful employment. These inmates are permitted to work outside (sometimes inside) county detention facilities at paid jobs while fulfilling their jail time. Participants in the program pay fees to help offset program costs.
13. Because there are not enough dedicated treatment facilities yet for beneficiaries of Proposition 36,*** the Main Jail is providing space until more Proposition 36 facilities are created.
14. As in past years, according to senior Jail staff, personnel turnover of correction officers continues to be a problem:
 - Approximately 14% leave each year for other locations (primarily Santa Clara County) where reportedly pay for equivalent responsibilities is about 30% more.
 - The accumulated costs to the county of recruiting, training and other turnover expenses are approximately \$60,000 or more per officer.
 - County correction officers believe the excessive accumulated cost is greater than an improved pay range with the resulting benefits of a stable workforce.

Conclusions

1. The Main Jail facility is kept in excellent condition and is well managed by its staff.
2. The Main Jail is significantly overcrowded. The Sheriff's Department should consider ways in which to relieve overcrowding.
3. Clinical evaluation by a qualified professional would be valuable for identifying mentally ill inmates and recommending appropriate housing placement and treatment.
4. The existing pay structure and high turnover of qualified correction officer personnel may be creating excessive costs to the county.
5. A comprehensive, electronic data management system, linked to other agencies as appropriate, would effectively serve the needs of the County Detention Bureau.

*** The Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act of 2000, which provides treatment in lieu of incarceration for minor drug offenders.

Recommendations

1. Funding and staff should be sought to evaluate and recommend proper placement and treatment for mentally ill inmates.
2. The Sheriff’s Department should resolve overcrowding issues at the Main Jail through the following measures:
 - Add a medium security wing to the Blaine Street facility and move appropriate female inmates to that location.
 - Relocate beneficiaries of Proposition 36 to the Rountree facility until appropriate treatment facilities become available.
3. The County Administrative Office should join the Sheriff’s Department in preparing a joint cost analysis that compares the current correction officer pay structure versus total yearly turnover costs for correction officers.
4. The County should implement a data management system as described in Conclusion 5. It will enable accurate tabulating, tracking and analysis and allow county law enforcement, county courts and detention facilities to efficiently share information. It would be very useful for county officials to receive a demonstration of the impressive tracking and analysis system used by the city of Watsonville.

Responses Required

Entity	Findings	Recommendations	Respond Within
County Board of Supervisors of County of Santa Cruz	1, 4	1, 4	90 Days (Sept. 30, 2003)
County of Santa Cruz Chief Administrative Officer	10, 14	3	60 Days (Sept. 2, 2003)
Santa Cruz County Sheriff	1-14	2	60 Days (Sept. 2, 2003)

Appendix

An attempt was made to obtain valid national and state statistics on the percentage of crimes that were drug related and rates of recidivism, to compare them with the numbers given by the Main Jail staff, but it was found:

- Recidivism ‘actuals’ relative to other jurisdictions within and outside California are difficult or impossible to obtain. According to several studies, good statistics don’t exist in most states. Many are distorted or even manufactured to support various agendas. In others, believed to be more reliable, source data and definitions are frequently absent and information is often outdated. A recidivism rate around 80% has been frequently asserted by many U.S. jurisdictions, but when challenged, it was determined accurate, scientific tracking had rarely been done to support the alleged numbers. A frequently published national average, reported by the U.S. Department of Justice, 2002, is 51% (based on DOJ certified statistics collected from only 21 states). (www.ojp.usdoj.gov)
- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, recidivism statistics have admittedly been suspect, because of faulty or incomplete reporting. Crime statistics are typically listed by type: robbery, assault, rape, burglary, etc., but as shown in crime reports from Santa Cruz County and elsewhere, many, if not most criminal arrests involve multiple types of crimes in a single event. Statistics for drug-related offenses are usually formatted in a way that makes over counting and undercounting virtually inevitable. Reading the statistics, there is no way to know if a single event, for example -- an aggravated assault during a burglary, while under the influence of drugs -- has been treated as one drug related crime or three. The U.S. Department of Justice agrees and has initiated the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS). As of March 31, 2003, only 21 States were NIBRS certified. California was not one of them. According to the DOJ, (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/nibrstatus.htm), California is in the Developmental phase: (the state/agency is in the process of designing and implementing various levels of data collection.
- Some U.S. jurisdictions describe programs used to significantly reduce recidivism by 20% or even up to 60%, but the accuracy of those results is unclear. For example, the methods used at “The Toughest Jail in Texas,” result in fewer repeat offenders -- in that jurisdiction -- but leave open the question whether the get-tough program merely moved the problem to less draconian venues. Also, jurisdictions with very harsh sentences (for example, high rates of 25 year terms without parole) guarantee low recidivism for another reason -- offenders are forever locked up at huge financial and social costs. Incarceration figures released by the U.S. Department of Justice the week of March 31, 2003 stated that as of that date one of every 142 people in the United States was incarcerated. Although the U.S. has only 4% of the world’s population, it has 25% of the world’s incarcerated population.

