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County Grand Jury Releases Report on Detention Facilities and Related Issues

Following a state mandate, the 2014-2015 Ventura County Grand Jury has completed its yearly inspection of all 15 facilities in Ventura County where persons are placed into custody. Its observations and conclusions have just been released in a report that also looks at the impacts of major law enforcement legislation.

Assembly Bill 109 (Realignment), discussed in previous grand jury reports, continues to have a major effect on the county's law enforcement community. Additionally, the passage of Proposition 47 last November is having significant impacts on the law enforcement environment in the county, including the reclassification of some property and drug-possession crimes that previously required jail time to misdemeanors that now only require citations.

The grand jury followed a well-established methodology: touring facilities, taking notes based on visual inspections, asking questions of facilities' personnel, and documenting the process. During the process, the grand jury observed and documented other factors that might affect the ability of law enforcement agencies to fulfill their responsibilities.

The grand jury's findings include the following:

- Space limitations of the Oxnard police station have affected the police department's ability to efficiently carry out its functions and responsibilities.
- The Santa Paula Police Department is operating with an inadequate and deteriorating physical facility.

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- The county has made a major effort to cope with the effects of Realignment with measurable success; however, overcrowding at the Main Jail and Todd Road Jail remains a problem.
- The availability of sworn officers in Santa Paula and Port Hueneme is inadequate.
- Proposition 47's consequences, both intended and unintended, are only beginning to be evaluated. Early indications are that it may be successful in reducing the state's prison population, but the effects on local law enforcement agencies and communities are yet to be understood.

The grand jury's recommendations include:

- That the Santa Paula City Council approve physical improvements at its police department facility and support an increase in police staffing consistent with that city's needs;
- That the Oxnard City Council obtain additional space for the Oxnard Police Department;
- That the Ventura County Board of Supervisors and the Ventura County Sheriff's Office be persistent in their efforts to build the mental health facility at the Todd Road Jail;
- That the Port Hueneme City Council increase police availability consistent with that city's needs; and
- That the Sheriff's Office, Probation and city councils closely track and evaluate the impact of Proposition 47 on local law enforcement agencies and communities and report findings to the Board of Supervisors.

The complete report, "Detention Facilities and Related Law Enforcement Issues," may be accessed at <http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury>; click on the "Annual Reports" tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2014-2015."

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Proposed photo caption:

The Main Jail at the Government Center has been greatly impacted by Realignment. (Grand Jury photo)