

Law, Justice and Public Safety Committee Activities

INTRODUCTION

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury has oversight powers and responsibilities as defined in the California Penal Code, sections 888 through 946. Penal Code 919B states that "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of public prisons within the county." In addition, operations of county law enforcement were also reviewed, as well as city law enforcement agencies within the county. With these responsibilities in mind, the Law, Justice and Public Safety Committee has compiled this report.

VISTATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

The following organizations were visited or made presentations before the committee:

Ventura County Fire Department

 Moorpark & Hazmat Truck

Sheriff's Department

Coroner/Medical Examiner's Office

Court Sponsored Activities

 Teen Court

 Mock Trials (High School Competition)

State of California Agency

 California Youth Authority

 Ventura School

Correction Services Agency

 Probation Department

 Colston Youth Center

 Clifton Tatum Center

Custody Division

 East Valley Sheriff's Station

 Main Jail

 Ojai Branch Jail Honor Farm

 Todd Road Jail

District Attorney's Office

 Victim Services

 Investigations Bureau

Public Defender's Office

 Investigations

Community Policing

Los Angeles County Sheriff

Main Central Jail, Men's (MCJ)
Sybil Brand Institute for Women

Ventura County Animal Regulation

RIDE-A-LONGS

In order to gain insight into the duties of police officers during a normal tour of duty, members of the Grand Jury participated in a ride-a-long program with county law enforcement agencies.

County Ride-A-Longs

Sheriffs Department
Camarillo Police Department
Moorpark Police Department
Thousand Oaks Police Department
West County Patrol

City Police Department Ride-A-Longs

Oxnard Police Department
Port Hueneme Police Department
Santa Paula Police Department
Simi Valley Police Department

Drug Enforcement
Patrol Division
Gang Sweep

Ventura Police Department
River Bottom Patrol

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury expresses its thanks to the law enforcement agencies of Ventura County for allowing us this opportunity to observe street level patrol and providing us with a better understanding of what police officers encounter in the course of their duties.

REPORTS OF VISITATIONS

Public Defender's Office

The Public Defender's office provides legal representation to defendants unable to afford the services of an attorney. This service is based upon need as determined by a review of an application submitted by the defendants. If it is determined that the applicants have the financial means to pay, they will be charged if they choose to use the Public Defender. The Public Defender's office also represents the mentally ill, developmentally disabled, and those in need of conservatorship.

The Public Defender also provides legal defense for juveniles, however, fees are assessed to parents if they can afford to pay. All legal representation is conducted as mandated by statute or State Constitution.

Victim Services Office

Since 1960, the crime rate in Ventura County has gone up drastically. Victim services, including rape crisis centers and compensation programs, have become very important. Victim awareness and rights involve: support during judicial proceedings, authorities' possession of evidence, serving as

witnesses, and financial and emotional effects. Crime victims often feel that they have lost control over their lives.

The Ventura County program began in 1978. A police report is required for victims' services to be provided. The services include compensation, counseling referrals, information on court proceedings, protection and support. \$200,000 of the annual budget of \$450,000 comes from grants.

"Advocate II" volunteers work with abuse and domestic violence, using experience plus education provided periodically by the office.

Ventura County Main Jail, Ventura, CA

The Ventura County Main Jail which became operational in August 1981 is a detention facility for inmates waiting to be adjudicated.

The facility has four levels with over 200,000 sq. ft. It's rated capacity is 412 inmates, but it currently housing approximately 700 inmates. Its modular design allows for indirect supervision and makes it possible for one officer to visually observe and electronically monitor 4 housing sections. This decreases operational costs and still provides all mandated services.

With the new Todd Road Jail Facility now open, the inmate population at the main jail has decreased from 1,004 in July 1994 to the current estimate of approximately 700 inmates.

The facility is staffed with sworn and civilian employees, however, only sworn officers interact with inmates. The non-sworn Sheriff's Service Technicians (SST's) staff the control rooms.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury commends the Commander and his staff for running a well maintained, clean and efficiently operated facility. Special mention is given to the medical staff for the very high accreditation they received from the State Inspection Agency.

Todd Road Jail Facility, Ventura County, CA

Under the Sheriff's Detention Facility Master Plan, the jail is designed to accommodate future expansion. A total "build-out" could accommodate of 2,307 inmates at this facility.

Today, the Todd Road Jail has a capacity of 784 inmates. The staffing consists of both sworn and civilian personnel. The facility houses only sentenced inmates in a "cluster" of four housing units, with 192 inmates each. The Control Center is the hub of each unit. Fourteen inmates can be housed in the segregation unit.

The inmates are offered substance abuse education and work skills development programs. Basic needs of inmates are provided within the respective housing units, by bringing the services to inmates.

The Food Service Department has a modern 10,000 square foot kitchen, which includes a bakery.

The vocational/industry complex was designed specifically to provide job skill development and vocational training.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury commends the Ventura County Sheriff for his philosophy and goals designed to assist inmates with basic job skills and to help inmates become responsible, contributing members of the community, upon their release.

Ventura County Branch Jail Honor Farm, Ojai, CA

The Honor Farm in Ojai is the home of two jail facilities. The men's facility (MEFAC) houses minimum security sentenced male inmates. The Women's facility (WOFAC) houses both sentenced and unsentenced female inmates. Currently about 250 inmates are housed at the Honor Farm.

Located on the grounds are a carpenter's workshop, a metal fabrication shop, and a livestock operation. The livestock operation supplies 150 tons of pork and an additional 10 tons of beef to county and youth facilities, annually.

Programs are available to honor farm inmates who apply and are screened for acceptance. One such program is the men's and women's "boot camp" style programs: "Project Pride" for the males, and "Project Discovery" for females. These programs include discipline, education, and extensive substance abuse treatment.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff's Department for implementing education and work ethics programs in order to return to society inmates who are less likely to become repeat offenders.

Department of Animal Regulation

The Animal Regulation Department is located at the Camarillo Airport. There is room to expand if necessary. On the property are animal holding buildings, a veterinary facility, an exercise pen, a quarantine building, a barn for animals that are victims of cancer, an euthanasia building and an administration staff building.

Revenue sources include impound boarding, spay-neuter, and animal licensing fees. Approximately ninety-five percent of the revenue is realized by the total number of animals collected from the cities with a contract for animal impounding.

Animal Regulation, along with the Ventura County Humane Society, investigate and impound abused, strayed and deceased animals.

Volunteers assist in presenting programs to schools and organizations to reduce the number of stray or abandoned dogs and cats and educate the public on animal care. "Big Dog" an Irish wolfhound, is the star of these presentations.

Juvenile Justice Complex Report

During visits to the Clifton Tatum Center and the Colston Youth Center, the Grand Jury observed that the existing system is being taxed beyond reasonable limits. With projected population increases, the problem can only worsen.

The following report detailing the severity of the problems with the present juvenile justice complex as it was presented to the Grand Jury by the Correction Services Agency:

Increasing urbanization of Ventura County has resulted in more big city crime and poverty, and placed greater pressures on youth. The increase in gangs throughout the county is concentrated in the youth population. Invariably, increased gang activity leads to increased youth violence. Since 1992 overall crime has gone down in Ventura County, but juvenile crime went up 18% particularly for felonies.

Juvenile crime is exploding. The physical resources of the Correction Services Agency (CSA) and the Courts are severely overextended and inadequate to meet the demands of an increasingly sophisticated, urbanized and violent youth population. When compared to counties of similar size, Ventura County has far fewer juvenile custody beds.

The Clifton Tatum Center (CTC), originally opened in 1955. In 1969, the administrative offices, the booking area, and a courtroom complex (now McBride School) were added. In 1971, Unit IV was added, bringing the rated capacity to 84. The age of the facility means that it is in constant need of expensive repair and renovation. In 1971, the youth population was 8,000, and the County had 145 institutional beds. The youth population has increased 31%, but only 8 beds have been added.

The original design of the building was meant to accommodate short term placement of primarily runaways and truants. It does not support staff efficiency, effective supervision or adequate security for the increasingly serious offenders and gang problems. The patchwork of renovations is unsuitable for both youth and staff.

When increasing crime made CTC bed space inadequate, the Correction Services Agency (CSA) instituted detention criteria in cooperation with local law enforcement. As population pressure increased, regulations became more restrictive, so that today only youth charged with serious or violent crimes are booked by law enforcement. The Court only detains youth considered to be a threat to themselves or others. CSA created and expanded alternative programs for punishment and incarceration, such as supervised community work crews, home supervision and electronic monitoring.

The crisis in juvenile facilities has continued to worsen in the past year. The June, 1995 study of overcrowding projected an average daily CTC population of 110 in 1996, 117 in 1997, and 124 in 1998. The actual average daily population from 7/95 to 3/96 was 110. On May 17, 1996 the population was 130.

California juvenile justice reform efforts are targeted to make youth more accountable in the criminal courts for serious, violent crime. This leads to longer detention in CTC pending court action. This trend is expected to continue and increase.

It is clear that Ventura County needs a juvenile justice complex to address the needs of delinquent youth in a comprehensive, effective and efficient manner.

COMMENDATION

The 1995/96 Grand Jury commends the Correctional Services Agency and the Probation Department for their dedication and continuing efforts to provide quality services to young people in trouble while facing deep budget cuts.