

## JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

### INTRODUCTION

The Grand Jury initiated a study to evaluate Ventura County's Juvenile Justice System. The objective was to determine the needs of the system. Since prior Grand Jury reports seem to have been ignored, we wanted to know the extent to which previous recommendations had been implemented, if at all.

### INQUIRY

The following places and departments were visited and personnel interviewed:

- Frank A. Colston Youth Center (Colston)
- Clifton Tatum Hall (Juvenile Hall)
- Juvenile Courts of Los Angeles and Ventura
- Juvenile Restitution Work Release Center
- California Youth Authority (CYA)
- Corrections Services Agency
- Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
- Multi Agency Juvenile Justice Coordination Council (MAJJCC)
- Office of Public Defender
- State Senators
- Community Meetings
- Office of District Attorney
- Orange County Juvenile Justice Complex

### DOCUMENTATION

The following reports were studied:

- Ventura County Juvenile Justice Local Action Plan, March 1997
- Corrections Services Agency Early Intervention Program
- Study of Overcrowding in Clifton Tatum Center and Analysis of Future Juvenile Facility Needs
- Ventura County Juvenile Justice Facilities Evaluation and Options (October 12, 1990) by an outside consultant
- Corrections Services Agency Early Intervention Program

## FINDINGS

- In 1990, an outside consulting firm recommended that the county build a 42-bed facility to accommodate the growing juvenile offender population, estimating that the facility could be operational by 1995.  
In subsequent years, Grand Juries and various other organizations have reported the crisis in juvenile facilities.
- The county youth population has increased 114% since 1985, yet juvenile institutions have added only eight beds since 1971.  
Since Ventura County has no juvenile camps, it has a 20-bed arrangement with Santa Barbara County.
- Colston and Juvenile Hall are overcrowded beyond occupancy limits. Stress is placed on the system by the necessity of separating gang members and hard core juveniles.  
Due to overcrowded conditions at Colston, juveniles sentenced to 180 days (whose parents participated in their rehabilitation programs) rarely served their full terms.
- Juvenile Hall is an antiquated facility which presents safety and security problems for assigned personnel.  
Maintenance requirements are high due to the age and design of the facilities. Indoor living and outdoor recreation spaces are inadequate, particularly the outdoor area which does not meet California Code of Regulations (CCR) standards. Because of grandfather clauses, Title 24, Part 1, Chapter 12, Subdivision (b) Exclusions the facilities are allowed to function even though they do not meet present codes.  
The Juvenile Judicial System has limited alternatives in its handling of juvenile offenders due to the lack of facilities, programs, and beds.  
Because of overcrowding, juvenile offenders under electronic surveillance and probation conditions are returned to the same negative environment from which they came.
- There are few county-wide intervention programs for juveniles who have mental health, drug, or alcohol problems. Drug and alcohol use are big factors in the commission of juvenile crimes. Those who have such problems are often ordered to attend adult Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.
- Juveniles frequently appear before the judge without a parent or guardian.
- Most of the problems regarding the Juvenile Justice System are due to the low priority in funding.
- Money can be made available from Proposition 172 (the sales tax initiative to raise money to be used in the fight against crime) by allocation of the County Board of Supervisors.
- There is no consolidated Juvenile System in Ventura County.
- There is little community involvement or input regarding juvenile problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The Ventura County Juvenile Justice System has major problems with its courts, staff, and facilities being overloaded.
2. The old facilities are a danger to employees and housed juveniles, and living conditions need to be improved.
3. Separation of gang members and hard core juveniles is not possible because of the antiquated design of the facilities and over-crowded conditions.
4. Since the existing facility is old, and maintenance costs are very high, construction of a new facility is the most practical way to resolve this problem.
5. The County needs a Juvenile Camp (not a boot camp).
6. Programs need to address mental health, alcohol, and drug problems.
7. Early intervention programs are a must to deter criminal behavior.
8. Judges are not requiring parents or guardians to appear with their children at every hearing.
9. The County Juvenile Justice System has not gotten its fair share of Proposition 172 money.
10. Additional money can be made available now through Proposition 172 funds.
11. The Board of Supervisors, although allotting some funds to the juvenile system, did not sufficiently address the scope of the problem.
13. It is imperative that communities participate in the discussion of juvenile problems and solutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Board of Supervisors declare the juvenile system a county-wide emergency and make the construction of a Juvenile Justice Complex a top priority, with or without state and/or federal funds.
2. The Board of Supervisors should visit the Juvenile Justice Complex in Orange, CA, as a model for Ventura County.
3. The Board of Supervisors put a bond issue before county voters, exclusively for Juvenile Justice System reform.
4. The Board of Supervisors should reconsider the Sheriff's proposal to close the Adult Work Furlough facilities at Camarillo Airport and transfer the adults to Todd Road Jail. This could save the county approximately \$1 million, and the vacant airport facilities could be converted to a minimum security camp for juvenile offenders. Correction Services Agency could still maintain control of the Work Furlough Program with the Sheriff only being responsible for housing the inmates.
5. Consideration should be given to building a Juvenile Justice Complex at the Camarillo State Hospital site.
6. Set up a commission (similar to a Police Commission) to oversee the entire juvenile system; it should have the same powers and authority.
7. The Board of Supervisors support AB1212 for establishing funds for juvenile capital expenditures which is now pending before the state legislature.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury wishes to commend all of the agencies which use their ingenuity, intelligence, and dedication in holding the juvenile system together. The accomplishments of MAJCC exceeded our expectations. Observing all of the agencies working together to address the many juvenile justice issues and to secure a state grant for needed programs was most gratifying.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

- Board of Supervisors
- Juvenile Courts
- Corrections Services Agency