

1999 - 2000
Ventura County Grand Jury Report
**The Sheriff's Department
Women's Detention Facility**

The Sheriff's Department Women's Detention Facility

Background

In August of 1999 the Honor Farm Minimum Detention Facility near the town of Ojai, California was converted to the Women's Detention Facility.

Methodology

A visit by the Grand Jury to the County of Ventura Sheriff's Department Women's Detention Facility, (the former Honor Farm), was made on January 22, 2001. The committee made a follow-up visit on March 15 in order to verify the findings made during the first visit. The committee viewed the plans for the remodel.

The captain in charge of the facility conducted the tours on both dates.

Findings

- F-1. During the initial visit, the captain in charge of the facility pointed out, that since the facility had been converted to a women's detention facility, the safety provisions for a visitor area utilized by high-risk inmates were inadequate.
- F-2. At present, the visitor area for high-risk inmates is a former inmate dining area. The separation of visitors from inmates is accomplished by the use of a removable wood partition placed lengthwise down the center of the dining table. (See photo 1)
- F-3. Sheriff's Dept. deputies now use metal detector wands to do searches of visitors prior to the visitor entering the designated visitor area.
- F-4. Each inmate is allowed a one-hour visit per week only on weekends.
- F-5. Up to 20 visitors are allowed into the visiting area at a time. There is a potential for up to 40 people to be in the visitors area at one time.
- F-6. Current staffing allows for only two (2) deputies in the visitor area.
- F-7. Formal plans exist to convert the present visitor area to a more secure area at an estimated cost of \$250,000.



Photo 1-Grand Jurors Demonstrating Lack of Security

- F-8. The overall facility is clean and well maintained.
- F-9. Educational programs are available to inmates.
- F-10. Meals are tasty and nourishing.

Conclusions

- C-1. Under current conditions, there exists the opportunity and the temptation for the passing of weapons and/or contraband from visitor to inmate. (F-1 through F-5)
- C-2. A wand search will detect only metal objects while other contraband (drugs etc.) could remain undetected. (F-3)
- C-3. The current situation is a potential threat to the safety and well being of both inmates and Sheriff's Department staff. (F-1 through F-5)
- C-4. The timely completion of the proposed plan to remodel the high- risk inmate visitor's area would help to prevent contraband from being passed between visitor and inmate. (F-6)
- C-5. The 100% prevention of contraband from coming into the visitor area is not possible due to legal restrictions, as no visitor can be subjected to a thorough search of his or her person. (F-3)
- C-6. The passing of contraband is currently minimal however, over time, the possibility exists for it to become more prevalent. (F-1 through F-6)
- C-7. Since the conversion of the facility to an all women's facility occurred some time ago, (August of 1999) steps should be taken to obtain the necessary funds and develop a timetable to complete this conversion as soon as possible. (F-7)
- C-8. The overall facility is clean, well maintained, and serves the inmates in a positive way. (F-8, F-9, F-10)

Recommendations

- R-1. The Sheriff should make the remodel of this facility a priority. (C-7)
- R-2. The Sheriff's Department and the Management of the facility should develop a realistic timetable for completion of the remodeling. (C-7)
- R-3. The Sheriff's Department should work with the GSA department to obtain the necessary funds from the current budget, via re-allocation, for the timely completion of the remodeling. (C-7)
- R-4. The Board of Supervisors should support and approve all efforts to fund the remodeling. (C-7)

Commendation

The Women's Detention Facility is oriented toward a positive experience for the inmates, to give them a helping hand up during their incarceration. (F-8 through F-10, C-8)

Responses Required

Director of Ventura County Women's Detention Center (R-1, R-2)
Ventura County Sheriff (R-1, R-2, R-3)
Ventura County GSA (R-3)
Ventura County Board of Supervisors (R-4)