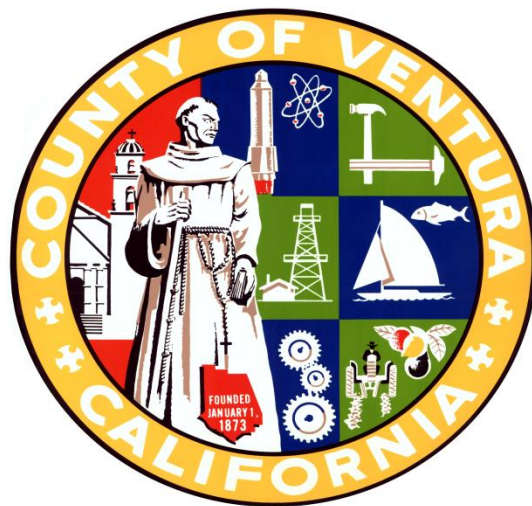


# **2020 - 2021 Ventura County Grand Jury**



## **Final Report**

### **Annual Inspection of Public Prisons**

**April 30, 2021**

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## Annual Inspection of Public Prisons

### SUMMARY

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 919(b), the 2020-2021 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is required to inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within Ventura County (County). The Grand Jury inspected the following public prisons in the County:

- Ventura County Juvenile Facilities operated by the Ventura County Probation Agency
- Pre-Trial Detention Facility operated by the Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO)
- Todd Road Jail operated by VCSO
- Ventura Youth Correctional Facility operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice

The East Jail, operated by VCSO, was closed in April 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic and is not expected to reopen until July 2021 at the earliest. Accordingly, the Grand Jury did not inspect that facility.

As of the dates of the inspections, the Grand Jury found that all the facilities inspected generally appeared to be well maintained and free of odors, litter, graffiti or unsafe conditions, except as noted below with respect to the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility.

The Grand Jury appreciates the cooperation of and the efforts made by the Ventura County Probation Agency, VCSO and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice that allowed the Grand Jury to conduct its inspections using COVID protocols in place at the time of the inspections.

### METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury conducted inspections of the Ventura County Juvenile Facilities (Juvenile Facilities), Todd Road Jail (Todd Road), the Pre-Trial Detention Facility (Main Jail) and the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility (VYCF). The East Jail was closed in April 2020 and, accordingly, the Grand Jury did not inspect that facility. The Grand Jury reviewed past Grand Jury reports and the following documents:

- Policies and Procedures Manuals of VCSO
- Memoranda, emails and notices regarding modifications to practices and procedures because of the COVID pandemic
- Daily Population Reports
- Incident Report Logs

- Most recent Fire Inspection Reports
- Most recent Health Inspection Reports
- Inmate Classification Matrix
- Grievance Logs

The inspections included walk-throughs of the facilities and discussions with the staff regarding the documents listed above and any issues noticed during the walk-throughs.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Ventura County Juvenile Facilities**

The Juvenile Facilities are operated by the Ventura County Probation Agency (VCPA) and sit on a 45-acre parcel in an unincorporated area of the County near the community of El Rio. The complex was completed in 2003.

The Juvenile Facilities were designed to house male and female youth over the age of 11 years on both a short-term (detention) and long-term (commitment) basis. The total capacity of the facilities is 420 male and female youth. The detention component capacity is 240 and the commitment component capacity is 180.

The detention component provides temporary custody for youth awaiting trial or transfer to another location. As of January 27, 2021, the number of youths in detention was 21. The commitment component provides court-ordered confinement of youth up to the age of 25. As of January 27, 2021, the number of youths in commitment was 40.

Pursuant to California Senate Bill 823 adopted September 30, 2020, commencing July 1, 2021, youth who would have been sent to the facilities of the California Division of Juvenile Justice will remain in the County. At the time of the inspection by the Grand Jury, the Juvenile Facilities had not yet developed a plan with respect to these youths beyond their intention simply to incorporate the youths into existing programs and procedures. The staff was expecting between 4 and 6 individuals, if any at all, to be returned from VYCF. The only youths that will be allowed to be at the Juvenile Facilities are County residents. As such, the staff of the Juvenile Facilities is already familiar with these youths and has files on them because they were previously at the Juvenile Facilities. In any event, the staff plans to maintain a strict policy of separation between youths (under 18 years of age) and young adults (ages 18 to 24). The separation includes the use of partitions and window coverings preventing any comingling of the two groups. This is done as a safety precaution.

The Detention Unit is comprised of one 60-bed male population housing unit, one 20-bed special population housing unit and one 15-bed female population housing unit. Each general housing unit contains 15 single sleeping rooms. The units have their own dayroom, classrooms, open staff station and outdoor exercise areas. The living units are designed with sleeping rooms, or cells, located on an upper and

lower level. A gymnasium and recreational yard are located adjacent to the units and are used for supervised recreational activities.

The special population housing unit consists of a 20-bed living unit designed for youth with significant mental health, behavioral or medical issues. The living unit has its own dayroom, classroom, and staff station. Sleeping rooms are all located on one level. Two outdoor exercise areas are available for supervised use by the youths.

The Commitment Unit is comprised of two 60-bed housing units. Each housing unit is divided into four 15-bed living units, each with its own classroom and two program rooms. Each living unit has its own dayroom and outdoor exercise area. Sleeping rooms are single occupant rooms.

At the time of inspection by the Grand Jury, the facilities appeared to be well maintained and free of odors, litter, graffiti or unsafe conditions.

The staff of the Juvenile Facilities appears to place great emphasis on a rehabilitation approach of rewarding good behavior, rather than utilizing a punitive-based system. They employ a points and rewards system referred to as STEPS to incentivize positive behavior and attitude. This approach is most evident in the Detention Unit where points earned for good behavior can be used to purchase snacks or other items from the canteen (commissary). The unit with the most earned points was rewarded by being allowed to watch the Super Bowl.

In the Commitment Unit, the focus is to prepare the youths to become self-sufficient adults. The staff seeks to assist the youths with developing life skills, from coping with stress to achieving gainful employment. Upon entry, each youth meets with staff to develop a personalized "case plan" for their transition. Upon release, regular meetings with an assigned field probation officer assists each youth to adhere to his or her case plan.

The Commitment Unit offers educational, vocational, and mental wellness programs. Youths can pursue their high school degree through Providence High School, an on-site high school accredited by the State of California and administered by the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools. The students have a rotating class schedule with classes beginning at 8:30 AM. Due to COVID restrictions, the classes were being held in a Zoom environment at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection.

There are also various vocational programs, including a radio station where youths learn how to operate the technical board and technical devices, as well as editing software, mixing boards and microphones. Musical instrument instruction for guitar, drums and other instruments is also provided by staff or volunteers. At the time of the Grand Jury's inspection, due to COVID restrictions, instruction was limited to staff, with no volunteers permitted in the facility.

Another workshop offers technical instruction for all aspects of general carpentry. Hands-on instruction is provided in such areas as framing, electrical wiring, drywall, stucco, roofing and insulation. In recent years, participating youth have constructed dog houses used for their on-site guide dog training program that was temporarily suspended at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection due to COVID restrictions.

Various therapy programs are offered covering many different topics, such as anger management and better coping skills. Staff also attempt to encourage youths to foster stronger familial bonding. There are on-site family visitation rooms, as well as visitation rooms specifically set aside for bonding with child family members. These rooms are utilized by youths who have a child or younger sibling.

### **Pre-Trial Detention Facility**

The Main Jail is operated by VCSO and was opened in 1980. It is located adjacent to the Ventura County Government Center Hall of Justice. An underground tunnel connects the Main Jail to the Hall of Justice for purposes of moving detainees to courtrooms. The Main Jail accepts arrestees from every law enforcement agency in the County.

The capacity of the Main Jail is 853 and, as of March 31, 2021, the total population in custody was approximately 560. Females are booked at the Main Jail and transported to Todd Road for continuing custody.

At the time of the inspection by the Grand Jury, the facilities appeared to be well maintained and free of odors, litter, graffiti or unsafe conditions. However, there appeared to be some minor water damage on a few ceiling tiles in the Lobby area and two areas of cracked ceiling plaster in the kitchen area.

The Main Jail has four floors with movement of inmates between floors by elevator with the inmate controlled by a deputy. Inmates arrive at Level 1 and are immediately tested for COVID and undergo a medical examination. Inmates are then searched, and the booking procedure commences for both men and women. The booking procedure includes a classification process that impacts a recommendation regarding an inmate's bail status as well as housing. Inmates are classified in one of four categories: general population, protective custody, administrative (those needing protection or separation), and violent/psychotic. Level 1 includes safety cells, sobering cells, showers, and the property room where personal items taken from the inmate are retained.

On each level, staff located in an enclosed control center monitor the inmates and control doors into and out of all areas. Level 2 includes the Lobby area, staff administrative offices, kitchen facilities, housing units for inmates with medical issues, and "administrative housing," which houses inmates requiring the most secure efforts. Assignment of an inmate to administrative housing is reviewed every thirty days. At the time of the Grand Jury's inspection, no visitors were allowed because of COVID protocols. Visits by video were available to inmates for a fee and telephone calls could be made at no cost.

Each of Levels 3 and 4 contains four housing units. Each unit includes four housing sections as well as a medical room, interview rooms and a recreation area. The housing sections in each unit include cells with two bunks, a toilet/sink/faucet unit and a bench. The cells are adjacent to a common area equipped with metal tables and benches and shower facilities. Additional bunks can be brought into the common area during temporary increases in population.

One housing section on Level 3 is used to isolate arriving inmates until they can be tested for COVID. Two other housing sections on Level 3 are used for psychiatric inmates. The population of psychiatric inmates averages approximately 150. Staff has instituted a program to reach out to the families of the psychiatric inmates to help with the inmate's treatment. This program includes efforts to reconnect with family members, identify events that trigger inmate behavior episodes, and strengthen coping skills of inmates. A consistent staffing team is used in the section and each deputy receives crisis intervention training.

There is a plan to refurbish all the housing units. One unit was being refurbished at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection.

Due to COVID restrictions, educational and vocational classes were limited at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection. Under normal circumstances, high school equivalency courses are available to all classifications of inmates. Vocational training is available depending upon an inmate's classification.

A recreation area is on the roof of the Main Jail, consisting of wire cages allowing inmates to get sunshine and exercise, based on good behavior.

### **Todd Road Jail**

Todd Road was constructed in 1995 and sits on 157 acres in a rural area between the Cities of Ventura and Santa Paula. It is operated by VCSO. The housing capacity of the facility, including overflow consisting of bunks placed in dayrooms, is 960. As of March 16, 2021, the total inmate population was 837, consisting of 706 males and 131 females. Of the total inmate populations, 199 were housed in bunks placed in the dayrooms.

Construction has begun on a new 64-bed unit designed to house inmates with medical and mental health issues. The project also will include a clinic and programming unit for inmates with medical and mental health needs. Completion of the project currently is scheduled in June 2022.

Due to COVID restrictions, in person visits were suspended at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection. Videophones have been installed to allow inmates to visit with family and friends.

At the time of the inspection by the Grand Jury, the facilities appeared to be well maintained and free of odors, litter, graffiti or unsafe conditions. Individuals are held in four units. Each unit consists of six sections, containing 16 two-bunk locking

cells attached to a common area. Showers are attached to each common area. Each unit also has its own medical office, interview rooms, and outdoor exercise area. Medical staff is always present.

Each common area has telephones for use by inmates. Due to the COVID restrictions on in-person visits at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection, extra phone calls were free. A new program is being instituted that makes available to inmates' computer tablets with which an inmate can watch video, access the law library and use the internet, all monitored by the staff.

Todd Road has a laundry and a commissary that services not only Todd Road but also the Main Jail. The commissary is staffed entirely by female inmates. Other work opportunities include kitchen workers, intake cleaning, laundry, lawn care, orchard work, and servicing the back dock.

Educational opportunities were limited at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection because of the COVID restrictions. Normally, vocational training classes are offered, including janitorial services and computer skills. Other classes are added as a need is perceived and an instructor can be identified. Culinary classes will be offered in the kitchen when COVID restrictions allow.

### **East County Jail**

The East County Jail is located at the VCSO East County Patrol Station in Thousand Oaks. The facility normally operates as a booking and housing facility. As a result of the COVID pandemic, the East Jail was closed in April 2020 and is anticipated to be reopened in July 2021 at the earliest. Accordingly, the Grand Jury did not do a physical inspection of the facility.

### **Ventura Youth Correctional Facility**

VYCF is one of three juvenile detention sites run by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and is located in Camarillo. The facility handles a male and female population and is the only State-run facility to which female DJJ youths are transferred.

California Senate Bill 823 was approved on September 30, 2020 and prohibits, with rare exceptions, further commitment of youths to DJJ facilities, including VYCF, commencing July 1, 2021, and requires all youths committed to a DJJ facility prior to that date to remain within the custody of DJJ until the youth is discharged, released, or transferred. The DJJ facilities, including VYCF, currently are planned to be closed in July 2023. Upon its closure, the staff of VYCF expects to remand two to four youths currently in custody to the Juvenile Facilities.

The maximum capacity of the facility is 400 youths. On April 29, 2021, the total population of youths was 227, including 197 males and 30 females. The age range is generally 14 to 24, with a maximum age of 25. The average age of a youth on April 29, 2021 was 19.1 years old. Most of the youths at VYCF are from Los



Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The average commitment is 18 months.

The VYCF campus consists of over 92 acres and includes 12 housing units, of which nine were in use at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection. The grounds reflect the age of the facility and lack of maintenance. No additional funds have been allocated for any major repairs or upgrades because of the state-planned closure of this facility in 2023. Many of the buildings' roofs have leaks covered with tarps and sandbags used to hold the tarps in place. The walkways are cracked and lifted in many places. The in-ground swimming pool is no longer in use due to a leak and mandatory retro-fitting to meet updated building codes.

All incoming youths receive an initial COVID test and are evaluated by medical staff for any issues of physical or mental health, medical needs, and educational needs. The facility has both medical and dental staff. Psychiatrists and mental health counselors are also on staff to prescribe medications and provide counseling services to the youths. Retired physicians offer tattoo removal services.

During the intake process, the youths are assessed on factors such as seriousness of offense, behavioral problems, and propensity for physical altercations. This information is used to determine their assignment to a housing unit. There are three core units based on risk level: low, moderate and high. A separate unit is designated for females. Two additional units are designated for youths with mental health issues and youths with serious violent behavioral issues. Each housing unit consists of 25 individual locking cells lining each of two long hallways. Each cell has its own sink/toilet unit, and is furnished with a bed, a small desk, and chair. A set of shelves for storage of clothes or materials is also provided. There is a common area with sofas, chairs and tables where youths can congregate. The housing units and common areas were generally in satisfactory and clean condition, although the buildings show some wear and tear. The youths generally are confined to their rooms from 9:45 PM to 6:30 AM.

During the day, each youth has a full schedule for schooling, medical treatments, counseling, exercise, and social activities. Those under the age of 18 who have not earned a high school diploma are required to attend the Mary B. Perry High School, a fully accredited high school. A five-course core curriculum is scheduled during varied hours between 7:45 AM to 3:00 PM, five days a week. They also work with local colleges to provide college courses to youths wishing to attend.

Youths also have several opportunities to attend vocational learning, such as computer coding taught on-site by employees of VYCF. The classroom includes multiple sets of computers and monitors. The students are also able to confer remotely with coding mentors from the adult prison system. VYCF offers catering, serving, and cooking classes, as well as concrete and construction classes. At the time of the Grand Jury's inspection, these programs had been temporarily suspended as a result of the COVID restrictions.

All staff encountered by the Grand Jury demonstrated a positive attitude toward the work they were doing with the youths. Through counseling rather than confrontation, the staff's efforts focus on teaching the youths life skills, adaptive skills and development of an attitude affirming their ability to succeed upon release.

**GLOSSARY**

**TERM**

**DEFINITION**

County	Ventura County
DJJ	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Division of Juvenile Justice
Grand Jury	2020-2021 Ventura County Grand Jury
Juvenile Facilities	Ventura County Juvenile Facilities
Mail Jail	Ventura County Pre-Trial Detention Facility
Todd Road	Todd Road Jail operated by VCSC
VCPA	Ventura County Probation Agency
VCSC	Ventura County Sheriff’s Office
VYCF	Ventura Youth Correctional Facility