

**COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE
GRAND JURY
12855 Justice Center Drive
Sonora, CA 95370**



**Tuolumne County Grand Jury
Jail and Detention Center Report,
June 6, 2024:**

**Dambacher Detention Center and Mother
Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility**



The Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility

SUMMARY

The 2023-2024 Tuolumne County Grand Jury visited the Dambacher Detention Center and the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility to report on their conditions. The Criminal Justice committee unfortunately was unable to tour the Sierra Conservation Center due to time constraints and lockdowns. Yet the committee inquired into the Board of State and Communication Correction (BSCC) reports to ensure conditions are being met. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury:

- Communicated with Tuolumne County Sheriff Pooley
- Interviewed Chief Probation Officer and staff
- Attended thorough, escorted tours of the two facilities
 - Dambacher Detention Center
 - Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility

All personnel cooperated with the Criminal Justice Committee and were generous with their time answering questions and escorting the group wherever they requested. The committee was greatly impressed by all the staff's dedication to providing quality care for their residents and to ensuring the safety of Tuolumne County citizens.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code, Section 929, requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

INTRODUCTION

California Penal Code section 919(a) states the grand jury may inquire into the case of every person imprisoned in jail of the county on a criminal charge and not indicted. Section 919(b) states the grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county. Section 919(c) states the grand jury shall inquire into the willful or corrupt misconduct in office of public officers of every description within the county.

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METHODOLOGY

The committee toured and interview staff at:

- Dambacher Detention Center November 30th, 2023
- Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility February 14th, 2024

The committee reviewed the BSCC reports of 2023 for:

- Dambacher Detention Center
- Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility
- Sierra Conservation Center

Confidentiality

Grand Jury members are sworn to secrecy regarding any matter brought before them. This assures all individuals that their testimony will be strictly confidential. Each Grand Juror must keep all evidence confidential. It is a misdemeanor to violate the confidentiality of any individual or evidence brought before the Grand Jury.

Recusal

The Grand Jury recognizes that a conflict of interest may arise during its investigations. In such instances the juror may ask to be recused from all aspects of an investigation. Those members do not investigate, attend interviews and deliberations, or assist in the making and acceptance of a final report that may result from an investigation.

Therefore, whenever the perception of a conflict of interest existed on the part of a member of the 2023-2024 Tuolumne County Grand Jury, that member abstained from any investigation involving such a conflict and from voting on the acceptance or rejections of any related subject.

CHAPTER 1: DAMBACHER DETENTION CENTER – DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The maximum occupancy of the jail is 230. At the time of touring the jail they had 129 inmates. Inmates may be male or female, unsentenced and sentenced. The facility houses under 150 inmates due to staffing, medical, and food demands. This number could be higher if staffing needs were consistently met. In 2011, California experienced a criminal justice realignment such that inmates may now serve their felony sentence either in a local jail or in a state prison depending on the charge for which they were convicted and their own prior convictions. As such, there is no limit to the time that may be served in a California county jail if the conviction is for a felony punishable by imprisonment in a county jail.

Due to this change, inmates may be in the Dambacher detention center for a lengthy time. Many programs usually seen at the prison have been adopted for the jail too. For example, inmates may be enrolled in Medi-Cal, Education, and Mental and Behavioral Health assistance. The purpose of these programs is to keep inmates happy, healthy, and prepare them for life outside the jail. There are also support groups like bible study, Alcohol Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous for inmates.

The jail is around 60,000 square feet, about double the size of the old jail. This allows room to grow in both staff and inmate populations. During the tour, the jail appeared to be clean, well maintained, and secure. The committee toured the entire jail and saw no areas of concern with the facilities.

Staffing seems to be one of the largest issues when it comes to the county jail. Even with hiring programs, retention is hard due to the mental and physical strain deputies and nurses experience. Additionally, on duty deputies often must be called to transport detainees to court hearings or for medical reasons. This can mean a deputy is removed from the field to transport as far away as Modesto. Another issue is on-site nurses. There was no 24-hour nurse at the booking station, resulting in the inmates being seen at Adventist Health Sonora. An additional booking nurse could prevent the need to transport inmates.

Another concern at the time of touring was the HVAC system. There have been many instances of the HVAC system not working at full capacity. This has caused the jail to become very cold or hot depending on the season. When the HVAC system is not working properly on a hot day the temperature in the county jail has reached 80 degrees or higher. There has been a lot of effort and work put into fixing the HVAC system, and it is encouraging news that the system seems to be working consistently now.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENDATIONS

Findings

F1. The Jail is currently short-staffed resulting in the need for on-duty deputies to preform transports.

F2. Additionally, at the time of the tour, the jail was short a booking nurse and a full-time registered nurse. There is a resource issue when it comes to hiring reliable and experienced candidates in Tuolumne County.

F3. HVAC system failures for heating and cooling the facility and backup generators only last so many hours when power goes out. This allows for hot or cold temperatures in the jail depending on the time of year.

Recommendations

R1. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury recommends that communication with the Board of Supervisors ensures competitive wages and benefits hiring and retention of staff. (F1 and F2)

R2. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury urges the County Jail to continue offering hiring bonuses, to increase future applications. (F1 and F2)

R3. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury recommends regular maintenance and system updates performed on the HVAC systems and generators to ensure maximum performance. (F3)

Commendations

C1. Staff were dedicated and well trained in safety precautions for staff, inmates, and the public.

C2. The facility is clean, secure, and well managed.

CHAPTER 2: MOTHER LODGE REGIONAL JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY – DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility maximum capacity is 30 juveniles, although the facility maintains a population of 16 or less juveniles at a time due to staffing issues. The Detention Facility contracts with five other counties to allow for juvenile youth out of Tuolumne County to be housed by the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility. This addresses overpopulation issues in neighboring counties and helps Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility with monetary cost.

Some of the accomplishments of this facility include WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accredited, PREA (Prison Rape Elimination Act) Compliant, and dual enrollment program with Columbia College. Having WASC accreditation demonstrates that the school within the Detention Facility has the capacity, commitment, and competence to support high-quality student learning and ongoing education improvement. Juveniles earn quality education in the system that counts towards their general education when they exit the system. This prevents detainees from being behind when being reintegrated into the classroom or encourages them to go back to school when given the chance.

PREA Compliance ensures that juveniles are safe in the Detention Facilities from workers and other juveniles. One of the most important things is to provide safety to these juveniles that have already been through so much. Being PREA Compliant also means having one Probation Officer for every 8 juveniles, instead of a 1 to 10 ratio. However, this increases the need for staff at the Detention Facility.

The Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facilities offer detainees the opportunity to earn their college credits. This program is greatly encouraged for those who have already graduated high school or have been in the system long enough to graduate.

When the Grand Jury toured the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility, they were down 5 staff members. However, there were new candidates starting after completing mandatory training. While this facility is relatively new, technology advances quickly. New security cameras with recording and audio capabilities should be implemented. The current security cameras do not record audio or video; this upgrade can help keep juveniles and staff safe, which is a priority at the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENDATIONS

Findings

F1. The Juvenile Detention Facility is understaffed, making it difficult to accommodate more juveniles when necessary.

F2. The Juvenile Detention Facility currently only runs around 50% capacity, our facility is very nice, and it would be a useful resource for your other troubled juveniles to use this facility. Many other counties do not have Juvenile Detention Facilities and could benefit from having access to ours.

Recommendations

R1. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury recommends a plan be put in place to accommodate additional youth in our facility. Possibly by partnering with more neighboring counties to run closer to capacity. (F1 and F2)

R2. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury recommends that the Mother Lode Juvenile Detention Facility offer similar employment incentives to those at the jail. (F1)

R3. The Tuolumne County Grand Jury recommends that the Mother Lode Juvenile Detention Facility acquire a new advanced camera security system with recording and audio capabilities.

Commendations

C1. The Grand Jury notes that the Mother Lode Juvenile Detention Facility staff really care about all the juveniles in the facility.

C2. The Grand Jury notes that the Mother Lode Juvenile Detention Facility staff and detainees share mutual respect.

C3. The Grand Jury notes that the Mother Lode Juvenile Detention Facility detainees participate in 4H, sewing, gardening, brush management, education programs, and so much more that enhances the quality of life.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Required Responses

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933(c), responses are required from the following governing body within 90 days: ^[1]

1. Board of Supervisors: Findings F1-F3 and Recommendations R1-R3; Chapter 1 and 2
Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933(c) responses are required from the following elected official within 60 days: ^[2]

2. Tuolumne County Sheriff – Chapter 1, Findings F1, F2, and F3

Invited Responses

Although not required under Penal Code Sections 933 and 933(c), the following responses are invited within [60^[3] or 90] days. ^[4]

1. Chief Probation Officer – Chapter 2, Findings F1 and F2