This document is an extract of a larger publication.

civilgrandjury.org is a project of UnGovr.org, a US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to government transparency and public accountability.



PLUMAS COUNTY JAIL

Reason For Investigation

The Plumas County Grand Jury is required to annually inspect any jail within the county in accordance with the California Penal Code.

Procedure

The Plumas County Grand Jury conducted an inspection of the Plumas County Jail. This included interviews with jail medical staff, Correctional Officers and supervisors.

Background

When fully staffed, sixteen correctional officers provide 24 hours a day, 7-days a week coverage. The officers are competent, well trained and dedicated to serving the citizens of Plumas County. The Plumas County Jail is over 35 years old. It is designed to house a maximum of 67 men and women inmates in minimum, medium, maximum and segregated facilities. It also includes a medical room, kitchen, laundry, recreational rooms and yard, control center, as well as office space and storage.

1. The Board of Supervisors controls the majority of the funding for positions within the jail through the Sheriff's Office budget. This affects the number of Correctional Officers available to secure the inmates in the jail and operate the facility as well as equipment, maintenance and training.
2. Unfilled positions and inadequate staffing levels place jail staff in constant jeopardy from violent inmates. Night shifts are limited to only two Correctional Officers on duty in the facility, there is little backup response available in case of an emergency. Day shifts may have as few as three Correctional Officers on duty.
3. The Board of Supervisors controls the hiring of Correctional Officers and other support personnel even when these positions are funded within the Sheriff's Office budget.
4. On October 3, 2007 the California Department of Corrections, Facility Standards and Operations Division, inspected the Plumas County Jail. The inspection determined that the County of Plumas is out of compliance with California State Law regarding the number of Correctional Officers required to be on duty at any one time to operate the facility. The County had 90 days from the receipt of their report, November 27, 2007, to submit a corrective action plan to the California Department of Corrections.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding#1-Facility/Equipment

The building is over 35 years old with outdated plumbing, wiring and utilities requiring constant and costly maintenance. The structure was built many years prior to the use of computers and video surveillance systems and installation of this equipment requires wall-mounted conduits, cables and wiring. The internal layout of the facility does not allow staff to be able to easily observe inmates in different parts of the jail as to respond to emergencies. It is often over capacity and often requires correctional officers to constantly move inmates from area to area for segregation and safety. Some of the observed problems: the kitchen is inadequate the laundry does not have enough capacity, there is a lack of storage and office space and the control center is not secure. The medical room lacks secure storage for medications and medical records.

Recommendation#1-Facility and Equipment

The Board Of Supervisors, Chief Administrative Officer and the county Risk Manager should conduct a comprehensive inspection of the jail facilities to see for themselves the condition of the facilities and the working conditions that jail staff is subjected to.

- The Board of Supervisors should direct the Planning Department to begin the process of designing a replacement jail constructed to modern standards and funding sources be explored.

- The Sheriff should immediately direct a comprehensive review of all kitchen, laundry, booking communications, security and other equipment with the goal of replacing worn out and inadequate items.

Finding#2-Staffing

The California Department of Corrections inspection of October 3, 2007 determined that the Plumas County Jail was out of compliance with state law regarding the number of Correctional Officers required to safely operate the jail. In accordance with minimum staffing levels determined by the jail commander, an additional 5 positions are required.

- The Board of Supervisors has delayed the hiring of critically needed Correctional Officers, often for several weeks, even though funding for those positions is available in the Sheriff's Office budget.

- Jail security requires one Correctional Officer to monitor the control room while the other Correctional Officer is out in the facility. If attacked by inmates the officer being attacked may be out of sight and hearing of the officer in the control room. If the officer in the control room responds the control room must be secured and left un-staffed while that officer responds. This means no one is observing inmates in the rest of the jail.

- The Jail Commander has requested on several occasions, that civilian staff be hired to handle routine administrative duties and control room monitoring so that Correctional Officers can more effectively operate and provide security to the facility.

- On any given day there are not enough Correctional Officers available to provide security for the medical personnel during morning sick call, supervise the kitchen during inmate meal preparation, supervise inmate laundry workers, supervise inmates cleaning cells and facilities, process inmates being booked into the facility, transport inmates to court, medical appointments or transfer inmates to out of county facilities, supervise the exercise yards, process inmates out of the facility and many other required duties. There are often shifts in which there is no supervisor on duty.

- In Plumas County, pay differentials are not provided to Correctional Officers who receive specialized training and continue to maintain certification for specialized duties such as emergency response teams, transportation and training officers. This practice tends to have a negative impact on correctional officer retention.

- The first level supervision of the Sheriff's Office for Deputies is that of Sergeant. The first level of supervision in the jail is Corporal. Given the level of responsibilities required of supervisors in the jail, the inconsistency between the supervisory titles of Sergeant and Corporal tends to have a negative impact on correctional officer retention.

Recommendations#2-Staffing

In order to comply with state law, provide for the personal safety of jail employees, and the security of the facility the Board of Supervisors should immediately authorize the hiring of 5 additional Correctional Officer positions in the jail.

- The Board of Supervisors should immediately authorize the addition and the hiring of civilian positions in the jail to perform routine administrative duties so that Correctional Officers are better able to provide supervision and security to the facility.

- The Board of Supervisors should transfer authority to hire Correctional Officers to the Sheriff when those positions are funded within the Sheriff's Office budget.

- In order for Correctional Officers to maintain training and certification for special duties, the Board of Supervisors should immediately authorize pay differentials for those officers who receive training and maintain certification.

- The Sheriff should immediately conduct a review of supervisory staffing levels in the jail to ensure full time supervision. Should the review indicate the need for additional funding in order to properly staff and supervise the jail function, the Sheriff should submit a proposal to the Board of Supervisors to provide appropriate levels of funding.

Conclusions

The jail facility of Plumas County is old, outmoded and unsafe for both inmates and jail staff. The Board of Supervisors should immediately start the process of developing plans and funding sources for a new jail.

The staffing of the jail has been determined by the State of California to be inadequate to operate the facility. This places tremendous liability on Plumas County, the Sheriff and the Board of Supervisors if an incident occurs that causes the injury or death of an inmate or Correctional Officer because of inadequate staffing.