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Report No. 6: Merced County Probation Department

Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Center

Mandated Inspection

Introduction:

On March 27, 2007, members of the Grand Jury toured the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Center located at 2586 West Sandy Mush Road, Merced.

Method of Investigation:

Members of the Grand Jury toured the facility and examined each dorm, food service facility, classrooms and recreational facilities.

Findings:

The supervisor of the facility provided an overview of the operation and conducted a tour of the facility. The facility has a maximum capacity of 122 juveniles and averages 90-110 juvenile inmates. The facility averages 8-10 bookings per day and can support surrounding counties. The average age of the juvenile inmates is 15-16 years old. The ratio of staff to inmates is 15:1. There are 6 officers assigned to each building (2) with four classrooms in each building. The facility is gang free.

The facility is in excellent condition, well organized and very clean. There is a central control station at each dorm wing where all activities are closely monitored. Supervisors went over the daily juvenile inmate schedule, starting at 6am through 10pm. Juvenile inmates continue their education with classroom instruction along with some vocational training. There are also sufficient recreational opportunities available to the juveniles. The jail ministries offer services on Wednesday evenings and on Sunday, on a voluntary basis. There is a courtroom located within the facility. This expedites the judicial process and eliminates any transportation issues or concerns. Some of the juvenile inmates are involved in graffiti abatement in the community.

The food service facility was inspected and found to be very clean and well managed. A nutritionist oversees the food that is prepared and served. The meals are prepared at the John Lattorraca correctional Facility and transported to the juvenile facility. The facility serves 120,000 meals per year with a cost of \$2.60 per meal. This year there is a 37-cent increase in cost per meal and another scheduled increase of 40-cent increase next year. The juveniles are also given snacks between meals.

The medical staff, which consists of a Registered nurse and LVN are available between 7 am until 11pm, then are on an on-call basis. A medical doctor is available twice a week and a mental health doctor is available every Friday. Mental health counselors are available on site most of the time. Severe mental health cases can be hospitalized at the Marie Green facility.

The staff brought up several issues of concern. First was the Governors plan of shipping the juvenile inmates from the California Youth Authority back to the county. Previously, inmates were sent to the CYA based on the severity of their crime. Now county juvenile facilities keep some inmates who have committed violent crimes. Another issue was the anticipation of an increase in staffing. Recruiting and retention of staff was becoming a problem. The turnover rate of staff was 20-25 % and they currently have 9 staff vacancies. This shortage of staff forces the use of overtime.

Recommendations:

Both the Juvenile facility and county need to pursue a more aggressive recruiting and retention program to meet the requirements as well as maintain their excellent operations and programs.

Commendations:

The staff is to be commended for their commitment and professional manner in which they manage the facility and the excellent work they have done