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# 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 two inspections of the Plumas county jail accompanied by supervisory and correctional officer staff and had one additional meeting with staff.

# BACKGROUND

The Plumas County jail was constructed in the 1970s, for a maximum capacity of 37 inmates. This structure also housed the administrative headquarters for the Plumas County Sheriff Department.

In the 1980s Plumas County was sued by an inmate alleging unsafe conditions in the jail because of lack of staff. Plumas County lost the lawsuit and under court order, brought staffing up to minimum standards.

In the 1990s a separate administrative headquarters was purchased for the Sheriff Department. This allowed enlarging the jail capacity to 67 inmates. Unfortunately, staffing of the jail was not sufficiently increased even with the almost doubling of inmate population.

The location of the jail is adjacent to a maintenance yard and the access road to a public dump.

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Plumas County Grand Jury recognizes that economic conditions make it difficult for the county to fund a needed replacement for the existing jail facility or to increase staffing to meet full staffing requirements. However, there are critical needs that may be met by Plumas County that would increase safety within the jail for staff and inmates at a manageable cost.

## Facility

***Finding:*** The facility is over 35 years old and is one of the last three linear-designed jails in California. This design does not permit staff to easily observe inmates in different parts of the jail and to respond to emergencies. Radio communications with sheriff's dispatch in case of emergencies is often impossible depending on the part of the jail in which the emergency is taking place. Both men and women inmates are held in minimum, medium, maximum and segregated facilities often exceeding capacity. This overcrowding often results in the forced early release of inmates into the local community.

The building has outdated plumbing, wiring and utilities requiring constant and costly maintenance. The structure was built prior to the mandatory use of computers and video surveillance systems and installation of this equipment required extensive wall mounted conduits, cables and wiring.

Because of the ability of non-law enforcement personnel and the public, including children, to access the area adjacent to the jail facility and outdoor recreation yard, the security of the jail is compromised. Weapons, drugs and other contraband can be secreted along the fence line to be retrieved later by inmates. This situation endangers the safety of Correctional officers and other inmates.

The kitchen is inadequate, the laundry does not have enough capacity, there is a lack of storage and office space and the control room is not secure. The medical room lacks secure storage for medications and medical records.

***Recommendation 1:*** **New Jail**
The State of California has placed Plumas County on a list to receive future funding for a new courthouse. Properly designed, the new construction could provide for a new jail, as well as court facilities. The Board of Supervisors should actively engage in efforts to elevate Plumas County's position on the list and secure the funding. In addition, the Board should challenge its state representatives to support funding of a new combined facility.

The Board of Supervisors has recently established a committee to meet with state representatives about possible locations for the new courthouse. We recommend that a citizens advisory committee be assigned to investigate and report other alternatives for the necessary replacement of the jail.

The Sheriff should assign a task force from within the department to provide detailed documentation to support the need for a new jail facility.

***Recommendation 2:*** **Critical Need**
Additional fencing and signage need to be constructed to provide for an exclusion zone so that persons may not approach the inner, recreation yard fence.

## Staffing

***Finding:*** Sixteen Correctional Officers provide coverage 24/7. Inadequate staffing leaves evening and graveyard shifts staffed by only two officers. One is required to staff the control room in order to monitor inmates while the second officer is out in the jail. In an emergency, the control room officer must abandon the control room to come to the aid of the second officer. If both officers were to be overpowered, inmates would have access to the control room and could release all prisoners.

Especially critical is the evening shift staffed by only two officers. It is during this time that special programs are going on, inmates may be out of their cells and the majority of bookings of new inmates take place. The danger of disruption and possible attack of correctional officers are greatest on this shift.

These dangerous conditions are a breeding ground for injury, death and costly lawsuits.

Inspections by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation have shown that the jail is understaffed by a minimum of five correctional officer positions. Three prior Grand Juries and this Grand Jury have also found the jail to be inadequate and unsafe. This places correctional officers, as well as inmates, in jeopardy. Without additional officers, this could potentially result in future lawsuits costing the county millions of dollars.

***Recommendation 1:*** **Critical Need**
At minimal cost, civilian positions could be funded by the Board of Supervisors to provide control room coverage. This would allow Correctional Officers to be out in the jail for mutual support and to assure the security of the control room.

The Board of Supervisors should immediately fund and authorize one additional Correctional Officer position to be assigned to the evening shift before a tragedy occurs.

***Recommendation 2:*** **Critical Need**
An adequate communication system needs to be installed so that officers are able to communicate with the sheriff's dispatch center in case of an emergency. Internal repeaters with a hard-line system to the dispatch center or other adequate system needs to be installed before an officer or inmate is injured or killed in an emergency.

# CONCLUSION

In spite of inadequate staffing and facilities, the staff of the Plumas County jail does an outstanding job in serving the citizens of Plumas County.

Progress toward replacement of the jail needs to move forward and existing critical needs must be addressed.

The Grand Jury expects responses from both the Plumas County Sheriff and the Plumas County Board of Supervisors.