

# **Siskiyou County Jail**

## **Too old, too under funded**

### **SUMMARY**

Too old, too overcrowded, too undermanned, inadequate funds for maintenance. The Jail Commander and his staff do an outstanding job running an operation crippled by overcrowding and a lack of funding for basic maintenance.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Siskiyou County Jail is the backbone of the Custody Division. The current Jail was constructed in 1987 with a 68 bed capacity. This has since been expanded to 104 beds, still grossly inadequate for the number of pre-trial felons and sentenced misdemeanor and felony violators in Siskiyou County. It is a totally self-contained facility with on-site food and medical services.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Members of the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury inspected the physical layout of the Siskiyou County Jail and were shown procedures for the handling of inmates. In addition, facility operations, maintenance, food service, and security were inspected by the Civil Grand Jury. In attendance were staff from the Siskiyou County Jail, including the Jail Commander, who answered questions concerning policy and procedures. Food service staff and maintenance staff were also interviewed. We also spoke to several inmates who were quite helpful.

### **DISCUSSION**

The Siskiyou County Jail was constructed in 1987, with a capacity of 68 inmates, but for many years has been too small to house the number of offenders arrested. Currently, it can house 104 inmates. Typically it has been operating at maximum capacity, with a “catch and release” approach. For every new inmate coming in, one has to be released, resulting in many serious misdemeanor offenders and even felons out on the street. This problem is exacerbated by the need to keep members of rival gangs separated for safety reason in a facility too small and not designed for the purpose. Even in a small county like Siskiyou, gang activity is a major problem.

Multiple ballot measures to fund a new and larger facility have failed to pass by the voters. Alternative housing and programs have been proposed and rejected by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors, i. e. Charlie Byrd Correctional Facility, as noted in

the Civil Grand Jury report of 2023/2024.

The Jail staff does a remarkably good job at maintaining good order and discipline, despite the low staffing levels, typically four officers and one sergeant per shift. There are on site medical care by nurses and doctors on call during normal working hours. However, Jail staff are often tasked with prisoner transport to Fairchild Medical Center when medical emergencies occur after normal working hours, which can leave the Jail understaffed.

Maintenance for the this aging Jail is very poor, due to lack of funding. The maintenance technician is particularly adept at fabricating parts no longer available. Simple items such as chipped paint and broken windows cannot be fixed due to the funding issue. One of the Civil Grand Jurors witnessed a window in the visitor area being broken in 1998. It still remain broken to this day. Many walls are cracked due to the age of the building. At least three phones in the visitor area are broken, with many of the other phones having issues. The phone in the lobby area, which has a sign stating "FOR ASSISTANCE Pick up phone," is broken and has been out of service for years due to a lack of funding. There is an intercom on the adjacent wall for contacting staff, but the other broken phone causes nothing but confusion.

The sidewalk around the Jail is badly broken and lifted, due to poorly placed landscaping trees creating a trip hazard and possible an Americans with Disabilities Act violation. This is a serious liability issue. This sidewalk is the responsibility of the Jail and therefore the County.

Food service staff were interviewed, and the kitchen was inspected. The kitchen was clean and functional in spite of its age. Food service staff goes to great effort to ensure food allergies and other food restrictions are complied with. We observed the practice where three days of meals are preserved in case of suspected food poisoning.

A recent innovation are computer tablets for each inmate provided by Network Communication International Center (NCIC) Correctional Services at no cost to the taxpayers. These provide each inmate with Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone calls, movies, and most importantly, online training courses. Inmates earn tokens from completing courses, which can be used to pay for phone calls, movies, and other online services. General internet and e-mail are NOT provided on these tablets.

The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) conducted a comprehensive inspection of the Siskiyou County Jail on July 23, 2025. In doing so, they found that the safety cells were not being utilized correctly. Siskiyou County Jail gave a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to the BSCC. This Corrective Action Plan addressed the noncompliance issues the inspection found.

The BSCC received the Corrective Action Plan from the Sheriff outlining the efforts to remediate the area of non-compliance. The Jail staff took immediate action, and based

on the logs provided, it was determined that the Jail is in total compliance with the minimum standards of the Board of State and Community Corrections. All Findings from the previous Civil Grand Jury inspection have been corrected or determined to be unneeded.

## FINDINGS

F1

Due to acute jail overcrowding, serious misdemeanor offenders and even felons are released early or never incarcerated at all. This presents a danger to the public.

F2

Jail staffing falls to critically low levels when prisoner transport is needed when medical emergencies occur after normal working hours.

F3

At least three phones in the visitor area are broken with many of the others having issues that make it hard to hear.

F4

The phone in the entrance area, which has a sign stating "FOR ASSISTANCE Pick up phone," is broken and has been broken for years due to a lack of money.

F5

The Jail interior is badly in need of painting. The inmates can perform this task if the County would provide paint and other needed materials.

F6

Various windows and doors, including those separating inmates and visitors have cracked glass.

F7

The sidewalk around the Jail is badly broken and lifted, due to poorly placed landscaping trees creating a trip hazard and possible Americans with Disabilities Act violations. This is a serious hazard to the public.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

R1

The County should seriously consider taking steps to build a new Jail or provide alternative housing for inmates.

R2

Increase staffing by at least one officer per shift or reassign after hour prisoner transport to Sheriff Deputies not on Jail duty.

R3

Repair phones in the visitor area.

R4

Remove the broken phone in the entrance area along with its misleading sign and label the intercom correctly.

R5

Provide funding for painting the Jail interior.

R6

Provide funding for repairing cracked glass in windows and doors.

R7

Remove landscaping and trees around the Jail and replace the sidewalk to Americans with Disabilities Act standards. This is a serious liability issue for the County.

ACCOMPANYING PHOTOS (8 Total):



Another crack in the wall



Broken sidewalk on Lane St.



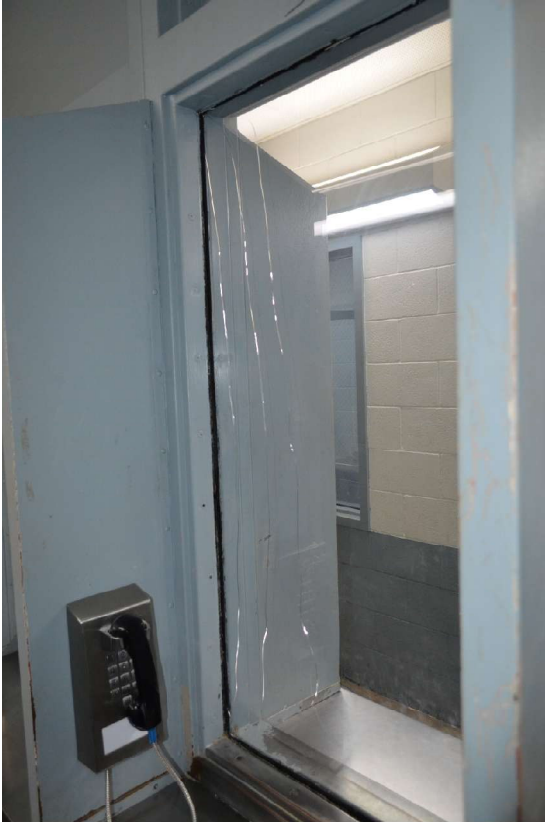
Broken sidewalk on Oregon St.



Broken window at main entrance.



Doorway to loading area.



Window witnessed by member of Civil Grand Jury as broken in 1998.



Phone broken for years.



Utility door on Oregon St.