



MADERA COUNTY GRAND JURY

P.O. Box 534, Madera, CA 93639



Valley State Prison

Final Report 2526-02

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Prepared by the 2025-2026 Madera County Grand Jury

SUMMARY

The Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) conducted an inspection of Valley State Prison (VSP) during the 2025–2026 term, in accordance with state mandate to inquire into public institutions, i.e., prisons and jails. The inspection included interviews with staff, Incarcerated Persons (IPs), and a review of data and records from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS).

VSP, originally designed to house 1,961 IPs, now operates well above its design capacity with a population of 3,057. The prison did not add to the initial structure; they added more beds in each cell. Although the institution has not exceeded its maximum capacity of 3,801, the strain on manpower remains evident. Staffing shortages and reliance on mandatory overtime continue to challenge operational effectiveness. Recurring concerns related to services, accommodations, family visiting and administrative actions result in a high amount of grievances. VSP maintains medical and mental health services and provides a wide range of educational and vocational programs, and facilitates access to rehabilitation and re-entry support. Programs such as the Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI), Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP), and partnerships with higher institutions demonstrate a commitment to IP reform and reintegration. The MCGJ commends the CDCR staff for maintaining a positive and supportive environment under these conditions.

GLOSSARY

AOD - Alcohol and Other Drugs

BSCC - Board of State and Community Corrections

CBI - Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

CCHCS - California Correctional Health Care Services

CDCR - California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

CPP - Community Partnership Program

DAI - Division of Adult Institutions

EOP - Enhanced Outpatient Program
GED - General Education Development
IP - Incarcerated Persons
ISUDT - Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment
MCGJ - Madera County Grand Jury
OMCP - Offender Mentor Certification Program
SUD - Substance-Use-Disorder
TRP - Tattoo Removal Program
VSP - Valley State Prison

BACKGROUND

All California civil grand juries are mandated to inspect the condition and management of the public prisons. The MCGJ conducted an inspection of the VSP facility on November 25, 2025. During the inspection, the MCGJ had the opportunity to speak with VSP staff and IPs. Additional requested information, such as current population and staffing numbers, details about grievances, and an overview of services and programs, was also requested and received.

VSP, a men's facility located at 21633 Avenue 24 in Chowchilla, CA, was constructed in 1995. Originally housing multi-level incarcerated females, the prison served as the state's only Secure Housing Unit for incarcerated females. After the passage of Assembly Bill 109 in 2011, which resulted in a decrease in the incarcerated female population, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) converted the prison to an all-male institution in 2013. VSP currently operates as a Level II facility, which the CDCR defines as a facility with open dormitories and a secure perimeter that may include armed coverage. IPs with a placement score of 19-35, determined by a review of case factors including: age, crime committed, prior incarcerations, gang involvement, etc., can be assigned to this facility.

METHODOLOGY

- Conducted an in-person inspection of the facility
- Interviewed VSP staff and IPs.
- Reviewed past MCGJ reports.
- Reviewed the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation website (VSP facility landing page and statistical reports: SB 601 Dashboard data)
- Reviewed the California Correctional Health Care Services website (IP's death reporting)
- Reviewed Men's Advisory Council Meeting Minutes.

DISCUSSION

The IP Population during the 2025-2026 MCGJ investigation was 3,057, with a maximum capacity of 3,801. It remains well over the design capacity of 1,961. The CDCR manages the state's prison population through its Division of Adult Institutions (DAI) <https://cdcr.ca.gov/adult-operations>, which oversees secure housing, rehabilitation, and support. DAI is organized regionally to improve efficiency. The CDCR also operates CCHCS <https://cchcs.ca.gov> for medical, dental, and mental health services.

At the time of the inspection in the fall of 2025 there were 1,113 staff members employed, and 115 vacant positions. According to data published on the CDCR website, in the fiscal year 2024-2025, an average of 133,130 hours of overtime were used by custody, dental and mental health, and non-custody staff. Such conditions can cause staff to become fatigued and overburdened, which may result in grievances.

Evidence of a well-groomed landscape was observed at VSP. The entrance to the facility and the surrounding areas of the administration building were observed to be well taken care of. The landscaping around the housing units was well-maintained. A portion of the maintenance of the landscape is being done by IPs. Renovations in the Administration building have been done. New paint and flooring were noticed in the building.

VSP utilizes an open dormitory-style housing layout rather than the traditional small pods, designed to hold a large number of IPs per unit. The MCGJ observed a cell in facility C. Each cell has four bunk beds, two sinks with mirrors, a toilet, and a shower. Correctional Officers conduct daily random searches of various rooms in the housing unit.

Nursing and primary care provider staff are available to IPs to manage routine and urgent care needs. Clinical nursing staff are on-site 24/7, and primary care providers are on-site during normal business hours and on-call for the remainder of the week.

Operational Procedure M0411 for Medication Administration is followed to ensure the safe administration of medication by licensed healthcare staff. Licensed health care staff issues, administers, monitors, and documents administration or delivery of all medication ordered by authorized prescribers within their scope of licensure under California law.

The Associate Warden of Housing and healthcare staff ensures that patients prescribed insulin receive their insulin prior to meals to minimize the potential for hyperglycemic reaction. IPs are allowed priority release by housing units for medication administration due to medical necessity and operational need.

Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment (ISUDT) - ISUDT is a comprehensive and evidence-based cross-divisional Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI) program to identify IPs at risk for substance-use disorder (SUD) related harms and provide treatment that reduces the risk of overdose and other complications associated with SUD.

The program's general objectives are to:

- Increase each IP's level of knowledge and skills associated with their SUD and issues contributing to their addiction.
- Increase each IP's level of knowledge and skills associated with their criminal behavior.

- Improve the IPs' relapse and recidivism prevention strategies and skills.
- Addresses criminal and distorted thinking in order to eliminate anti-social thinking.
- Addresses issues that contribute to the IP's SUD and criminal behavior, including: trauma, coping skills, relationship skills, emotion management, and expression of emotions.

Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) - OMCP is a voluntary program for long-term and life without the possibility of parole IPs, which provides them with the training, education, and an opportunity to become an Offender Mentor Certified Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Counselor. Upon graduating from the OMCP, the Offender Mentors are assigned as co-facilitators, working alongside AOD-certified contracted counselors.

The VSP Education Department offers educational services to the IP population via two service delivery streams: the Academic Program and the Career Technical Education Program. As of December 2025, approximately 2,600 of the IPs are in programs offered by the Education Department. Education is currently operating under a “six-year accreditation without a review” issued by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

There are 14 classes in Adult Basic Education levels I, II, and III; General Education Development (GED); Transitions; and High School. VSP also offers AA Degree programs through Feather River Community College, Coastline Community College, and Merced Community College, as well as a BA Degree program through California State University, Fresno. In 2024-2025, 55 IPs received their GED Certificates; nine received their High School Diplomas; four received their Associates Degrees, and two received their Bachelors Degrees.

Vocational Programs - Automotive Mechanics, Building Maintenance, Cosmetology, Computer and Related Technology, Small Engine Repair, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Welding, Electrical Works, Carpentry, Plumbing, and Masonry.

During the MCGJ tour, the MCGJ observed tiny houses that were currently being built by students in the Carpentry Program.



Photo Courtesy of VSP Public Information Officer

The MCGJ also toured the First-Ever Barber School within a California Prison. With the help of a famous viral content creator and entrepreneur, the school opened its doors in August of 2025. The program offers IPs hands-on barbering education, allowing them to earn a license and re-entry with a career path, linking education to re-entry success.



Photo Courtesy of VSP Public Information Officer

Community Resources Department - The Community Resource Department identifies, develops, and manages community-related areas, resources to meet VSP and IP programs' needs by planning, organizing, and directing the Community Partnership Program (CPP) between the VSP community, stakeholders and special interest groups. The Community Resources Department oversees CPP development by planning, organizing, and directing programs to develop, allocate, and coordinate community resources. They provide decisions in the design and implementation of new and innovative programs to benefit IPs and the institution.

Statewide Tattoo Removal Program Resumption - The DAI has resumed the Tattoo Removal Program (TRP). The program is a voluntary service which IPs may participate in, based on criteria and disciplinary history. The tattoo removal services are provided by a contracted vendor within a self-contained mobile unit.

The following criteria determine which IPs may participate in the TRP:

- IPs who have highly visible tattoos on the face, neck, hands, and wrists. Additional locations such as the head, forearm, and collarbone may be approved on a case-by-case basis and require final approval by DAI.
- IPs who are within two years of release.

- IPs who are disassociating from gang activity by actively participating or having completed the debriefing process.

Freedom Canine Project - The Freedom Canine Project pairs rescued dogs with IPs for obedience and service training which leads to American Kennel Club certification. It utilizes a new on-site dog park, focusing on rehabilitation by teaching IPs responsibility and empathy, with many dogs going on to serve as service dogs for veterans and community members. This program has been successful in changing the lives of both the trainers and the rescued dogs.

Food Services Department - The MCGJ had the opportunity to tour the central kitchen at VSP, which includes a kosher kitchen. The regular heart-healthy diet is the “core” diet at VSP. Menus are based on a “Healthy U.S. Style Eating Pattern” as recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The diet is based on principles found in the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the Choose My Plate food guidance system, and the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine and National Academies.

Each IP is provided a wholesome, nutritionally balanced diet. Nutritional levels shall meet the Recommended Dietary Allowances and Dietary Reference Intakes established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences. IPs are provided three meals daily, two of which shall be served hot. Variations to the two hot meals per day requirement may be allowed to accommodate religious observance, religious programs, and institutional emergencies. The breakfast meal is served no more than 14 hours after the previous day’s meal.

The IPs meals are pork-free. No pork or pork derivatives are to be served. All menu items besides the meats are collagen-free, i.e., soup base and gelatin.

The central kitchen was observed to be sanitary and well-organized. IPs working in the kitchens are required to be cleared by medical services and complete a 52-week food service training program, which qualifies them in food preparation and food handling.

FINDINGS

F1.The MCGJ finds there are adequate educational and vocational opportunity programs for IPs.

F2.The MCGJ finds that the Freedom Canine Project provides inmates with the opportunity to develop compassion, confidence, and responsibility.

F3.The MCGJ finds that the new Barber School provides opportunities for IPs to be able to get their State Barber License and provides a path toward a long-term career that is available to them upon release from prison.

F4.The MCGJ finds that family visiting has been impacted by the renovations of the family units to make them American Disabilities Act compliant. According to the Warden, they are awaiting final approval from the State fire marshal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1.The MCGJ recommends that the CDCR continue providing well-rounded offerings of educational and vocational training with post-release employment opportunities.

R2.The MCGJ recommends that the Freedom Canine Project continue.

R3. The MCGJ recommends that the Barber School continue to provide opportunities for IPs.

R4. The MCGJ recommends that the CDCR continue to work at the state level to get the inspections completed on the family visiting unit to allow the IP's family to continue with family visitation.

INVITED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Madera County Grand Jury requests responses within 60 days from the following:

Warden Valley State Prison
21633 Avenue 24
Chowchilla, CA 93610

Public Information Officer - VSP
21633 Avenue 24
Chowchilla, CA 93610

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95841

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