

CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON – SOLANO 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report

REASON FOR INSPECTION

California Penal Code §919, subdivision (b) provides: “The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” Pursuant to the statute, on October 1, 2008, the 2008-2009 Solano County Grand Jury inspected the California State Prison-Solano located at 2100 Peabody Road, Vacaville, California.

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Interviewed Warden and administrative staff
- Toured Level Three housing units in Facility One and Two
- Toured the Developmentally Disabled Program
- Toured Level Two housing units in Facility Three
- Toured the Optical Laboratory Unit of the Prison Industry Authority
- Toured the Bindery Unit of the Prison Industry Authority
- Toured the Metal Fabrication Unit of the Prison Industry Authority

BACKGROUND /SUMMARY

The primary mission of California State Prison-Solano (CSP-Solano) is to provide custody, care and treatment and rehabilitative programs for male felons committed to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation by the courts. The prison opened in August 1984 and covers 146 acres in Vacaville.

At the time of the Grand Jury’s visit, the inmate population was 5,471. Total current inmate capacity is 6,302 but housing capacity includes the conversion of gymnasiums to dormitories with three-tiered beds.

According to prison administrative staff, CSP-Solano has a staff of approximately 1,500. The staff includes uniformed correctional officers, administrative staff and medical personnel. At the time of the Grand Jury’s tour, 11% of the uniformed officer positions were vacant due to a current statewide hiring freeze. Officers working overtime fill the vacant custody positions. The facility operates on an annual budget of \$121 million. The average inmate cost per year is estimated to be approximately \$20,000.

CSP-Solano is designed as a medium-security institution housing Level II and Level III inmates in four separate semi-autonomous facilities; this also includes a 400-bed Administrative Segregation Unit; and a 16-bed Correctional Treatment Center. Level II and Level III inmates are housed separately. An inmate’s security level is based on an individual assessment of his criminal history, prior incarceration history, current commitment offense and actions during incarceration. Level III inmates are considered higher risk and require more security.

CSP-Solano was licensed in June 2006 by the California Department of Health Services to contain a Corrections Treatment Center. The Treatment Center is able to house six chronically-ill and nine mentally-ill inmates for a maximum of 10 days. Those requiring longer treatment are sent to other facilities within the State.

The prison has a Developmental Disability Program that houses inmates in a separate, dedicated unit. There is also a Disability Placement Program. Inmates with psychiatric disorders are assigned to the Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP) and are temporarily housed at CSP-Solano until they can be transferred to an appropriate institution/facility. CSP-Solano is not designated to house EOP inmates because it is not equipped to handle those inmates on a permanent basis.

CSP-Solano has been selected to initiate a pilot rehabilitation program under AB900. Inmates are eligible for the program when they have less than 48 months left to serve. The program begins with a risk needs assessment questionnaire administered in the prison by Parole Division staff. This program follows the inmate through prison rehabilitation programs and eventual release to re-entry facilities in various communities.

As part of its mission, CSP-Solano provides opportunities for meaningful rehabilitation for incarcerated inmates. The institution provides work/training programs, academic education, career technical instruction (vocational training) and industries assignments geared towards providing inmates with work skills and vocational education.

The Prison Industry Authority (PIA) employs inmates and trains them to enhance their ability to obtain employment when they are released from prison. Two of the programs offered under PIA at CSP-Solano are Metal Fabrication and Optical Manufacturing.

The Metal Fabrication Unit is contained in a large, updated, fully-functioning facility. It manufactures special vehicle equipment for Caltrans, prisoners' metal furniture and lockers for use throughout the California prison system. It employs 173 inmates.

The Optical Laboratory manufactures prescription and safety eyewear for prison inmates, Youth Authority wards, Medicare and Medi-Cal patients, state hospitals and eligible state and local government employees. The laboratory currently employs 86 inmates.

Other PIA programs include: Book Bindery, Laundry, and Warehouse. These three programs employ 287 inmates. The Bindery provides good quality loose-leaf binders for state offices, highway signs for Caltrans and disabled license plates for the DMV. The Laundry provides services for the California Medical Facility and Napa State Hospital. Inmates in the Warehouse help to meet the ongoing supply needs of the prison. There is a long list of inmates waiting to fill PIA positions. CSP-Solano is hoping to expand the number of PIA positions in order to add an additional 150 inmates to this program.

The institution has a variety of self-help programs including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Veteran discussion groups, Victim Offender Reconciliation Group and Prison Outreach Program (POP). Through academic and vocational training, industries assignments, addiction and recovery programs and self-help programs, the institution provides inmates with the opportunity to develop the life skills necessary for successful re-integration into society.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has outreach programs with local communities. CSP-Solano is involved in the development of these programs. Two examples are:

- 1) The Prison Outreach Program, which cooperates with local schools and police departments to inform and show youths the consequences of unlawful behavior.
- 2) The Victims Offender Reconciliation Program, which gives the opportunity for victims of violent crimes to visit the prisons. Victims meet with inmates convicted of violent crimes and help to demonstrate that victims are real people who have suffered serious consequences from the actions of criminals. Religious services are available for those who wish to participate.

Current Program Participation:

Academic Education:	Inmate Capacity: 748
Vocational Education:	Inmate Capacity: 482
Prison Industry Authority (PIA):	Inmate Capacity: 546
Division of Addiction and Recovery Services:	Inmate Capacity: 400
College Courses:	328 currently enrolled.

An ongoing problem confronting prison staff is the smuggling of cellular phones into the prison. This creates additional security problems. Prisoners using unmonitored cell phones may communicate and coordinate escape plans and other illegal activities. Incarcerated gang leaders could use a network of cell phones to order simultaneous riots, attacks on other gangs and staff assaults throughout the California prison system. They could also order killings and oversee other criminal activity outside the prison.

Some of the prison staff indicated that they would like to see legislation that would make cell phone possession by an inmate a felony. Possession is currently dealt with as an internal matter resulting in the loss of good-behavior credits which can eventually be restored.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 - California State Prison-Solano is a well organized, administered and run confinement, treatment and rehabilitation facility that is currently being operated under challenging circumstances.

Recommendation 1 – Continue operating in the same manner, given current circumstances.

Finding 2 - Possession and use of smuggled cell phones by prison inmates poses a serious security problem that is not being adequately addressed within the prison system. Prison staff is hampered by a disciplinary system that is governed by legislation and case law and that imposes no serious penalties for cell phone possession by inmates. Possession of a cell phone merely results in the loss of accumulated good-behavior credits, which can be restored as a result of subsequent good behavior.

Recommendation 2a - The Grand Jury recommends that the California State Legislature pass legislation making cell phone possession by a prison inmate a felony punishable by an additional prison sentence.

Recommendation 2b - Given the gravity of the situation, we recommend that the Solano County Board of Supervisors sponsor legislation as part of its legislative platform to make it a felony for inmates to possess cellular phones within a state prison as well as a felony for staff or visitors to provide inmates with cell phones.

Finding 3 - There are not enough positions available for all the inmates who are seeking to work in Prison Industries programs. It can be argued that adding positions to these programs would not actually result in greater cost to the state, as the work product provided by Prison Industries workers represents a cost savings to the State departments that use these products and services.

Recommendation 3 - The prison administration should actively seek to increase the number of inmate work positions in the Prison Industries programs.

Finding 4 - The CSP-Solano AB900 pilot rehabilitation program has the potential to reduce recidivism and to consequently reduce prison populations in California, which will result in cost savings to the State. This is an experimental program that does not have assurance of future funding.

Recommendation 4 - The Grand Jury recommends that the California State Legislature continue to fund the CSP-Solano pilot rehabilitation program.

COMMENTS

Past Grand Juries have made recommendations regarding ways to effectively deal with cell phone possession by inmates. The recommendations were made to the prison, which is the local office of the California Department of Corrections. In order for recommendations to be seriously considered, they must reach the appropriate agent of change, which in this case is the California State Legislature - not the local prison. Implementation of Recommendation 2a would require *legislation* to impose realistic penalties for cell phone possession by inmates. In an effort to emphasize the gravity of this issue, courtesy copies of this report are being sent to appropriate members and committees of the State Legislature along with a cover letter reiterating our concerns and requesting a response to those concerns.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED AGENCIES

Warden California State Prison-Solano
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Solano County Board of Supervisors

COURTESY COPIES

City of Vacaville – Mayor, City Council and City Manager
Vacaville Police Department
Solano County Sheriff/Coroner
Solano County District Attorney
State Senators, Districts 4 and 5
State Assembly Districts 7 and 8
Warden California Medical Facility
The California State Senate, Public Safety Committee
The California State Assembly, Public Safety Committee