

CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON – SOLANO
2009-2010 Grand Jury

REASON FOR INSPECTION

California Penal Code Section §919, Subsection (b) provides: “The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” Pursuant to the statute, on September 1, 2009, the 2009-2010 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 III housing units in Facility One and Two
- Toured Level II 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 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) by the courts. The prison opened in August 1984 and covers 146 acres in Vacaville.

CSP-Solano is a Level II and Level III general population prison consisting of four separate facilities. Level II and Level III inmates are housed separately. The Level III inmates are considered higher risk and require more security. 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. A study was done by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) to validate the classification system based on points to ascertain how the assessment of the prisoners would conform to the system. When the prisoner is admitted to the facility, they are assigned a certain amount of points. The points indicate their level of security, i.e. Level I, minimal security, to Level IV, maximum security. The prisoners may come in as a Level IV, but can have points deducted to bring them to a Level I, e.g. they have either been working and/or have not been in trouble for years. This program has been in effect for six years. It saves the taxpayer money by not having to keep moving prisoners around.

CSP-Solano was built in 1984. Its original design was constructed for a capacity of 2,610 prisoners. In 1996, 1,000 more beds were added at the Level II dormitory facility, bringing the number of beds to 3,610. At the time of the Grand Jury’s visit, the inmate population was 4,943, which is 1,333 inmates over capacity. At the time this report was finalized in December, 2009, the warden advised the Grand Jury that the new inmate total population is 5,115, an overage of 1,505.

The gymnasium previously converted to a dormitory, was considered a dangerous situation for the inmates and correctional officers and is no longer used to house inmates.

This year's annual budget is \$116 million. Last year's budget was \$108 million, not including Education. The Education budget is \$8.1 million. (It was noted that they have spent \$4,278,002.00 in overtime.

CSP-Solano was licensed in June 2006 by the California Department of Health Services to contain a Corrections Treatment Center. The Health Care/Medical budget 08-09 is \$47 million. The Pharmacy budget is \$8 million. AB-15 placed a cap on medical expenses and will greatly impact their budget. At the time of the Grand Jury's visit, there were 7 medical health beds and 7 mental health beds filled. Inmates requiring a higher level of care are sent to other facilities within the State.

On the day of the Grand Jury's inspection, the pharmacy processed approximately 1900 prescriptions. The average is approximately 2000 per day. The facility has a Digital X-ray machine but does not have software/hardware to transmit to offsite hospitals; however, the Digital Image capacity can store 5000 images. Once the capacity of 5000 is reached, images are lost. A Radiological Information System (RIS) would reduce the need for films, chemicals, and chemical waste. In addition, it would reduce cost significantly by allowing immediate off-site transmission and interpretation by Radiologist who can then provide immediate diagnosis. This would offset the cost associated with materials, custody and security, medial guarding, transportation, handling, processing, and storage of film. Further it would improve patient access to care. They would like to make use of tele-medicine: a webcam set up for inmate/doctor conferences for problems that do not require a doctor's hands-on examination.

INMATE WORK PROGRAMS

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 industry assignments geared towards providing inmates with work skills and vocational education. There are 59 teachers, 32 academic programs, and 17 vocational programs. As a result of a \$250 million reduction to CDCR's statewide budget for rehabilitative programming, CSP-Solano expects some changes in program levels, however; the details have yet to be determined.

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

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. They also make truck beds with sides and boxes from raw material. Over \$3.0 million in products are produced annually. All inmate welders are certified through the American Welding Society. This certification is recognized nationally.

The Optical Laboratory manufactures prescription and safety eyewear for prison inmates, agencies providing for children and the legally blind, Medicare and Medi-Cal patients, and state hospitals. The average daily production is 400-600 pair. One inmate is a Master Optician, one of approximately 600 in the United States. Inmates are certified by the American Board of Optometry. This certification is recognized nationally.

The PIA also offers Book Bindery. The Bindery provides good quality loose-leaf binders for state offices, highway signs for Caltrans, file folders for the New Mexico Department of Corrections and disabled license plates for the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). They have contracted with other states agencies to make diploma covers for schools. Additionally, they have contracted to produce covers for other states and school systems. Due to the budget crisis, 30-40 men rotate working each week, with further work cuts possible in the near future.

Inmate Employability Program

To enhance the employability of inmates, California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) has developed the Inmate Employability Program (IEP). Using the CALPIA factory as a foundation for skills development, the IEP goes a step further by making industry-accredited certification programs available to qualified inmates and showing them how to use these skills in obtaining meaningful jobs upon their release from prison.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

CSP-Solano offers a variety of Inmate Leisure Time Activity Groups (ILTAGs) and inmate self-help programs to assist inmates in their rehabilitation in order to reduce recidivism and increase public safety. The ILTAGs are operated by paid staff sponsors. Many of the inmate self-help programs are facilitated by trained community members who serve as volunteers in an organized capacity, decreasing program operational costs to CSP-Solano and CDCR. Other inmate self-help programs are coordinated by staff members as a part of their primary job functions. There are programs operating such as Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Solano County Child Support Services, Veterans Re-Entry, Victim-Offender Reconciliation Group (VORG) – Tawheed and A Step Closer, and more, many of which are new this year.

CSP-Solano organizes many community service programs and events including bi-annual blood drives for the Blood Centers of the Pacific and sponsoring local children through Christmas Wish. The second annual softball tournament, Peace Officers Reaching Kids (PORK at the Plate 2009), raised more than \$5,500 for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Solano County, Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), and Vacaville Counterforce Police Activities League (PAL). Two new programs this year include “Kick in the Change” and “Adopt-a Family.” “Kick-in-the-Change” is a program where employees and food vendors collaborate to donate monies to local charities and events are hosted monthly. Since February 2009, more than \$3,000 has been donated to charities including: American Cancer Society, Correctional Peace Officers Foundation (CPOF), City of Vacaville McBride Senior Center, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Solano County, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, Solano Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT), Mission Solano, Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), Opportunity House, Solano County Office of Education – Irene Larsen Center, Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club. “Adopt-a-Family” for 2009 Holidays will assist 12 families with 54 members providing meals for Thanksgiving and Christmas, plus gifts, holiday trees and decorations and visits from Santa.

This year inmates donated \$5,189.00 to the City of Vacaville McBride Senior Center, and \$5,189.00 to the Vanished Children’s Alliance.

CONTRABAND ITEMS

In 2008, four staff members were caught breaking the rule by bringing contraband (cell phones and cigarettes) into the Facility. The staff members involved were immediately dismissed. Prisoners lose good-behavior credits when they are caught with contraband. Those credits can eventually be restored.

An ongoing problem confronting prison staff is the smuggling of cellular phones into the prison. This obviously creates additional security problems. In the past, inmates have ordered criminal activity inside the prison. Incarcerated gang leaders have used a network of cell phones to order simultaneous riots, attacks on other gangs, killings, and staff assaults throughout the California prison system. They could also oversee other criminal activity outside the prison. Prison officials indicate that smuggled cell phones are more lucrative than drugs.

At the time of the finalization of the Grand Jury's report, the warden advised from January through November 2009, 559 cell phones were confiscated from inmates; an average of two cell phones per day in the first three months of the year. As a result, a pilot program was introduced at CSP-Solano using a cell phone sniffing dog. The dog can detect a cell phone by its scent upon entering the inmate's cell. It can also be detected from outside the cell. The in-house market price to purchase each cell phone ranges from \$300-\$800 among the prisoners depending on the features the phone offers. Although technology is available to block cell phone signals, its use is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) violation. Prison staff and area residents would also be affected by a cell phone block. Because of the FCC restriction, searches will have to continue to be made by the Correctional Officers and the specially trained dog.

During the last Legislative session, CDCR sponsored Senate Bill 434 which would have made possession of a cell phone in prison (by an inmate or ward) or the intent to deliver a cell phone to an inmate or ward a misdemeanor. SB 434 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee due to the cost associated with implementation of the bill. At the federal level, currently before the House Judiciary Committee and the Energy and Commerce Committee is critical legislation that would assist the State of California in reducing violence and crime in our prisons. The Safe Prisons Communications Act of 2009 (H.R. 560/S. 251) would allow the Governor to petition the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to be granted a waiver so that cell phone jamming devices could be installed in our prisons.

The Senate recently passed their version of the bill unanimously. The Governor is very supportive of this legislation. We are hopeful that the legislation will move quickly out of the Committees and go to the floor as soon as possible.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 - The prison is well organized in maintaining control of the prisoners. Excellent programs are offered to the prisoners, and it appears that most of the guards have a good rapport with the prisoners. The facility is currently being operated under challenging circumstances, e.g. overcrowding, loss of staff positions.

Recommendation 1 - California State Prison should continue implementing these programs, even with the current economic circumstances, so that a decline in the recidivism rate in Solano County might be realized.

Finding 2 - Possession and use of smuggled cell phones by prison inmates is still a potentially serious security problem that is not being adequately addressed within the prison system. Prison staff has a robust disciplinary system to take job action against employees who bring contraband into prisons but, the system is hampered by inadequate criminal penalties.

Recommendation 2- The Grand Jury recommends that the California State Legislature move forward with legislation, Senate Bill 434, which would create criminal penalties for anyone smuggling cell phones into state prisons.

Finding 3 – In light of the budget cutbacks, there is anticipated growth in the area of community partnerships, specifically as they relate to increasing volunteer services offered to inmates.

Community volunteers are utilized for various programs at CSP-Solano including ILTAGs, inmate self-help programs, religious programs, substance abuse programs and education. To name a few, community volunteers are regularly used for Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) Assembly of God, 40 Days of Purpose, Great Dads, Kingdom Living, Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Passport to Purpose, Self-Esteem by God's Design, Solano County Child Support Services, Transitional Ministries, Veterans Re-Entry, and Victim-Offender Reconciliation Group (VORG) – Tawheed and A Step Close.

For example, more than 40 volunteers have been cleared to serve as volunteers for Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Al-Anon. Over 100 religious volunteers are cleared to serve the myriad of practicing faith groups. Through the Hospitals & Institutions Committee of Northern California, Narcotics Anonymous (NA) volunteers are currently being recruited with an anticipated program start date in January 2010. Additional volunteers and staff sponsors are being sought to offer other programs focusing on substance abuse, parenting, anger management, domestic violence, music, veterans' re-entry, life skills, youth diversion prison outreach program, and much more. More programs could be offered with additional self-help sponsor funding and trained community volunteers.

Recommendation 3 – In order to encourage much-needed community volunteers, the prison administration should publicize events and programs that are offered to inmates in newspapers, county newsletters, libraries, etc.

COMMENTS

AB900 Pilot Rehabilitation Program, which will result in cost savings to the State, has the potential to reduce recidivism and ultimately reduce prison populations in California. The Grand Jury recommends that the California State Legislature continue to fund the CSP-Solano AB900 Pilot Rehabilitation Program.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED AGENCIES

California State Prison-Solano

The California State Legislature

The California State Legislature, Public Safety Committee

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

COURTESY COPIES

Solano County Board of Supervisors
City of Vacaville – Mayor
City of Vacaville – City Council
City of Vacaville – City Manager
Vacaville Police Department
Solano County Sheriff/Coroner
State Senators, Districts 4 and 5
State Assembly, Districts 7 and 8
California Medical Facility