



**2010-2011
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
State of California
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Valley State Prison for Women**

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Introduction:

On March 10, 2011, in accordance with California Penal Code section 919(b) which states "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county", the Madera County Grand Jury visited the Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) located at 21633 Avenue 24, Chowchilla, California adjacent to the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF).

VSPW began operation in May 1995 and currently has a staff of 1,078 which includes 450 custodial and 628 non-custodial employees. The budget is \$80,005,696, down \$50,000 from last year. This does not include the budgets for medical services and education, which are \$26,000,000 and \$2,816,293 respectively. The State contracts with Prison Industries Authority (PIA) to run self-supporting laundry and optical laboratory operations at VSPW. No state funding is received for these two operations.

The facility is situated on 640 acres. For security and safety, there are ground sensors around the perimeter fencing and two towers/gates, one for personnel to pass through and the other for vehicular traffic. Those inmates who cannot get along with other inmates are provided with small exercise yards with 10 feet high chain link fences topped with razor wire.

Findings:

The Grand Jury found that VSPW was originally designed to house 1,980 inmates. On March 10 the inmates totaled 3,327, ranging in age from 18 to 80. All have been convicted of felonies. Their sentences range from a minimum of one year to a maximum of life without parole.

The Grand Jury found that the Receiving and Release (R&R) section of VSPW is the first stop for incoming inmates and the last stop for those being transferred, paroled, or released. There are no cameras in the R&R area. Here inmates are given basic supplies and fingerprinted. Each one is given an identification card which she must keep on her person at all times. If she changes her appearance in any way, she must get a new picture for her ID card at a personal cost of \$7. All are dressed in orange jumpsuits. An inmate with a handicap or special medical need is given a colored vest which denotes her special need. Inmates are then placed in Unit A for 30 to 90 days, during which time medical and psychiatric evaluations are completed to determine proper housing placement. An inmate found to be in the later stages of HIV is moved to a facility next to CCWF.

The Grand Jury found that there are four yards with four housing units per yard, including two special dorms: D-1 and D-3. Placements in these two dorms are coveted and have rigid qualification criteria: must have less than three years of sentence remaining with exceptions for "Lifers", and no disciplinary issues for two years. An inmate who fails to meet these qualifications is removed and will not be eligible for reconsideration for two years. Currently there are 225 honor residents, 75% of whom are "Lifers" with or without parole. D-1, known as the Honor Dorm/Light House, has a common area which is large and clean with numerous live plants. Doors are unlocked from 6:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Seven official counts are taken per 24-hour period. Qualified inmates age 55 or older may opt for D-3, known as the Senior Housing Complex/Silver Belles. Inmates in D-1 and D-3 receive special privileges not afforded to other inmates. They receive meals and commissary privileges ahead of other inmates, and they may choose their roommates. The Grand Jury questioned whether these privileges are in conflict with requirements for fair and impartial treatment of inmates.

The Grand Jury found that inmates with mental health or disciplinary issues are housed in the Administrative Segregation Unit, where mental health workers interact with and counsel them daily. The Security Housing Unit (SHU) is a jail within the prison which houses inmates who display more serious disciplinary issues. It has 44 cells with a maximum capacity for 124 inmates. Medical staff is on duty daily until 9:00 p.m.

The Grand Jury found that in the central kitchen and bakery areas, food preparation follows strict and rigid guidelines, and the medical and religious needs of inmates are met. Food is prepared three days in advance using the blast and chill method. When removed from the freezer, the food is sent to the satellite kitchens, reheated, and served. All areas of the food service operation were clean and efficient. The Assistant Food Manager noted that several State Inspectors had rated the VSPW kitchen as the cleanest in the state. The Grand Jury noted that the noise level in this area was very high.

The Grand Jury found that the daily caloric intake for each inmate is set at 2,300 calories. The same menus are served at all state prisons, with the standards and guidelines set by the official State Registered Dietitian. Inmates receive two hot meals and a box lunch daily. The cost of feeding each inmate is \$2.90 per day.

The Grand Jury found that inmates have immediate access to medical help 24 hours per day. The infirmary averages 800 to 1,000 medical appointments per day, which equates to approximately 4 to 5 appointments per inmate each month. VSPW houses 40 to 90 pregnant inmates at any given time.

The Grand Jury found that the medical staff consists of 12 to 15 doctors, 36 registered nurses, 4 nurse practitioners, 27 to 34 licensed vocational nurses, and 12 psychiatric technicians. Telemedicine capabilities also are available. Due to federal receivership, the medical staff and costs have increased five-fold. The medical Chief Executive Officer noted that by switching to generic medications, a savings of approximately \$60,000 per month over 2 to 3 months was realized.

The Grand Jury found that VSPW has an emergency room, x-ray and general laboratory, pharmacy, psychiatric, optometry, physical therapy, and dental offices on-site. The infirmary has three safety cells where inmates can be placed on suicide watch. The cells have padded walls, a mattress on the floor, a toilet (grate over a hole in the center of the cell), and a camera which is constantly monitored by medical staff. Inmates who are believed to have a communicable disease can be placed in one of ten negative pressure rooms with a unique filtration system. Medical staff is able to dress in protective clothing in an ante-room before entering the patient's room. Observation rooms are available for monitoring inmates on a one-to-one basis.

The Grand Jury found that the Optical Laboratory, operated by PIA's 10 non-custodial workers, employs 108 inmates with 100 on a waiting list. The pay scale is based on grade, step, and availability and ranges from \$0.30 to \$0.95 per hour. Upon graduation from the program and release from VSPW, 5 to 7 percent of inmates have been able to obtain employment in this field. The laboratory's production process extends from prescriptions through shipping of the finished product. It is competitive with private industry. An average of 1,400 pairs are made and shipped each day.

The Grand Jury found that the Laundry, also operated by PIA, serves the needs of three prisons, i.e., VSPW, CCWF, and Salinas. Costs are charged to the other facilities at \$0.30 to \$0.35 per pound. Most of the steps in sorting, washing, and ironing are automated, with only a few processes performed manually. The turn-around time is in by 7:30 a.m., out by 4:00 p.m. Inmates are trained in the mixing of chemicals per OSHA rules and given the opportunity to take certified Laundry Linen Management or Washroom Technician courses through on-line classes from the University of Kentucky. Some inmates have also received fork lift operator licenses. Five inmates have been able to obtain laundry management positions after their release.

The Grand Jury found that fifty percent of education classes and programs have been cut due to statewide budget reductions. Available program opportunities are General Education Diploma (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL), an Associate of Arts (AA) degree, Cosmetology testing and State licensure, Fiber Optics, Basic Computer, Office Services, Electronics, Automotive, and Welding certificates.

The Grand Jury found that upon release, a parolee is given \$200. She is transported to the nearest bus station by an officer who purchases her ticket and retains possession of it until departure time, maintains constant supervision and watches her board the bus, and remains at the bus station until the bus departs. The parolee is returned to the location where she was booked so that she can be registered and monitored while on parole. A parolee may be released to a family member who has been previously approved.

Conclusions:

The Grand Jury concludes that the Laundry and Optical Laboratory are well run, efficient operations that afford inmates the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience for job opportunities upon release.

The Grand Jury concludes that prolonged exposure to the high noise level in the central kitchen area may contribute to health issues.

The Grand Jury concludes that budget constraints have greatly reduced educational programs and opportunities for inmates.

The Grand Jury concludes that dispensing generic medications whenever possible could result in significant annual savings.

The Grand Jury concludes that the special treatment of inmates in housing units D-1 and D-3 may not follow requirements for fair and impartial treatment.

Recommendations:

The Grand Jury recommends that the noise levels in the central kitchen area be evaluated for possible safety hazards.

The Grand Jury recommends that generic medications be dispensed whenever possible.

The Grand Jury recommends that VSPW Administration evaluate whether the facility is in compliance with the requirements for fair and impartial treatment of inmates.

Respondent: Written response required pursuant to PC 933(c)

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Respondents: Response optional

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