

2024-2025 TUOLUMNE COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

Detention Facilities Reports

April 21, 2025



SUMMARY

Each year the Tuolumne County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury), per California Penal Code 919(b), is required to investigate the conditions and management of the detention facilities within our county. This year, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury toured all three of our county's facilities: Sierra Conservation Center (SCC), Dambacher Detention Center (DDC), and Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Center (MLRJDF), and found them to be clean and generally in good condition. All three facilities were found to be adequately staffed for their inmate populations and were operating within the guidelines and mandates set forth by the California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) and California State Law. Established procedures were being followed within each facility and inmates were being provided access to medical, dental, mental health care and rehabilitation programs.

DEFINITIONS

BSCC – California Board of State and Community Corrections
County – Tuolumne County
DDC – Dambacher Detention Center
Grand Jury – Tuolumne County Civil Grand Jury
GREC – Gold Ridge Education Center
IEP – Individual Education Plan
JHR – Judge's Honor Roll
MLRJDF – Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility
MOU – Memorandum of Understanding
PI – Prison Industries
SCC – Sierra Conservation Center
Youth – Juvenile Detainees

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury took an in-depth tour of each of our three detention facilities:
Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) – Adult – (male only)
Dambacher Detention Center (DDC) - Adult – (male and female)
Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility (MLRJDF) – Juvenile – (male and female)

During each tour, the Grand Jurors were briefed by facility staff about the site's inmate population, programs available to inmates, and any special management posed by either the population or the facility itself. Jurors spoke with the facility's management, various support staff and detainees. Management and staff from MLRJDF's county and regional partner agencies were also interviewed.

The Grand Jury also reviewed the following Documents:

- California Code of Regulations Title 15 “Minimum Standards for Local Detention Facilities (Title 15)
- Board of State and Community Corrections – Title 15 Minimum Standards for Juvenile Facilities
- Board of State and Community Corrections – Targeted Inspection, 2022-2023, 2023-2024
- Assembly Bill - AB 109 (The Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011)
- Proposition 47
- California State Association of Counties – Juvenile Facilities in California
- MLRJDF contracts and MOUs with Regional (out of county) partners
- MLRJDF Policies and Procedures Manual (2023 revision)
- MLRJDF intake and assessment forms
- Tuolumne County Juvenile Probation Services

CONFIDENTIALITY

As your Grand Jury, all members are sworn to secrecy regarding any matters brought before them. All testimony is strictly confidential. This allows individuals interviewed in the course of a Grand Jury investigation to speak freely without fear of reprisal. Additionally, interviewees are admonished that they are not to discuss their interview with *anyone*. Violating the confidentiality of any individual’s testimony or evidence brought before the Civil Grand Jury is a misdemeanor, prosecuted by the County District Attorney.

RECUSAL

Grand Juror, Clinton Parish recused himself from all actions, inquiries, investigations, discussions, recommendations and writing of this report. As a practicing attorney in Tuolumne County, who may currently or have previously represented inmates housed within Tuolumne County detention facilities, the recusal of Mr. Parish prevents any conflict of interest, or the appearance of any conflict of interest with respect to this report.

DISCUSSION

Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) commonly referred to as the “prison”, was eager to host the Grand Jury for an extensive tour of the facility. Due to lockdowns and security concerns the Grand Jury was unable to tour this facility in the previous two years. This year’s Grand Jury met with administration personnel who outlined facility operations and programs. Followed by a tour of the three levels of security yards, dining hall, medical and dental facilities, pharmacy, school facility, vocational training center and the fabrication shop operated by Prison Industries (PI) where the

inmates sew both yellow safety vests for Cal Trans and white boxer shorts (underwear) for prison inmates in California. Although overnight visitation facilities are available for families of inmates at SCC, they were not included in the Grand Jury tour.

SCC is responsible for 31 of the 34 fire camps within California with an average of 1,750 inmates training in the fire camps. The fire camp program contributes much needed strike teams to our state and local firefighting resources. Each fire camp strike team is made up of seventeen inmates trained and ready to respond to wild land fires, battling alongside our dedicated fire personnel to protect lives, homes, personal property, businesses, livestock, wildlife, and woodlands throughout California.

SCC partners with Friends of the Animal Community (FOAC) to rehabilitate dogs through the PUPP Program. The PUPP Program takes dogs that are difficult to home because of behavioral problems and pairs them with SCC inmates for 1 on 1 behavior training and socialization. The training transforms problem dogs into positive additions for their future families. The PUPP Program not only rehabilitates the dogs, it also helps rehabilitate the inmates, teaching them responsibility, patience, time management and cooperation as they learn to work together to succeed as trainers. Upon completion of the training, the dogs are returned to FOAC for placement in loving homes throughout the County and the Mother Lode area.

During off-duty time, many SCC employees contribute to our community through participation in a variety of fund-raising events. One such event is a semiannual Blood Drive that supports local and regional blood banks that provide for the blood needs of Tuolumne County. They also hold and contribute to local Food Drives, Clothing Drives, and seasonal Toy Drives as well as help with the Special Olympics of Northern California. All proceeds, goods or services generated by these events support local and regional charities.

Dambacher Detention Center (DDC) commonly referred to as the “jail”, can accommodate 230 detainees (male & female) if fully staffed and can hold both adjudicated and inmates awaiting sentencing. DDC assists the Sheriff’s office in overseeing the County sponsored encampment for the county’s unhoused population located adjacent to DDC. The encampment provides a safe and sanitary location for the unhoused population, reducing the risk to themselves and local property. The encampment provides a central location where they can access needed County services. As well as providing County agencies with a way to stay connected to the needs of our unhoused population.

During the tour, it was mentioned that the facility is still in need of a connecting walkway to the adjoining courthouse. This walkway primarily affects the administration area and does not impact

the staff's ability to meet the needs of detainees nor the facility's compliance with the rules and regulations governing detention facilities.

Food is provided by Summit Foods and prepared by trusted inmates of DDC for both the DDC and MLRJDF residents. This is a financial benefit to the County because it eliminates the need to maintain a redundant, fully equipped and staffed kitchen. Having both the DDC and the MLRJDF on the same campus also allows for sharing a state-of-the-art dental program between the two facilities.



Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility (MLRJDF)

The Grand Jury found the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Center (MLRJDF) - commonly referred to as "juvenile hall" - is fulfilling their Mission Statement:

"The mission of the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility is to provide for the safe and supportive detention of youth requiring secure rehabilitative services. It is guided by the belief that high risk youth are capable of changing negative patterns of conduct through active participation in evidenced based and best practices programs empirically proven to promote positive change. In furtherance of this mission, youth detained at the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to reside in a safe and secure environment, to receive fair and consistent treatment, and to participate in all available programs intended to foster physical, moral, emotional and intellectual growth. Further, the Mother Lode Regional Juvenile Detention Facility is committed to providing a safe work environment for staff, in addition to abiding by case and statutory law, and meeting all standards set forth within the California Code of Regulations, Title 15, for the care of youth in secure detention."

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with the Probation Dept. Administration and staff, partnering agencies both in County and Regional partners (counties with bed contracts with the facility). We also had engaging interviews with some of the incarcerated Youth who proved to be very forthright

regarding the reasons they were incarcerated and their outlook for their future. We found a facility run by a very caring and supportive staff, comprehensive rehabilitation programs with a focus on breaking the cycle of generational delinquency. Per our interviews with other counties Probation Departments, our partnering counties are pleased to have this regional facility available to their Youths. Throughout the Mother Lode Region the MLRJDF is recognized for their positive rehabilitation programs and follow-up care. The BSCC has sited the MLRJDF as an example of a well-run facility for other Juvenile Detention Facilities in the state.

The educational element for the facility is provided by Gold Ridge Education Center (GREC) which is a Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accredited School. Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools provides the administration of this program. All GREC programs are designed to be tailored for the special needs of the individual Youth. Most Youth (70-80%) who enter the facility test below grade level and have an existing Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place. GREC provides an average of an 8 to 1 student/ teacher ratio which allows for each Youth to receive plenty of individual instruction and the freedom to use their time while incarcerated to make up missing credits as well as advancing at their own speed. In addition, Youth participating in the "Camp Program", have the option, upon graduation from GREC, to continue their education through Columbia College. They may also participate in the Prison Education Program that provides virtual training through the California University system. This is a powerful self-esteem builder. GREC also provides onsite licensed therapists with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous within their scope of practice.

Youth receive individual and group therapy such as "Dialectical Vocational Training" which modulates extreme behavior and Behavior Replacement Training for aggression management as well as substance abuse counseling through County Behavioral Health Services. Family and adult support people are included in Youth treatment plans whenever possible, which aids in Youth retention of positive behaviors learned while participating in rehabilitation programs. GREC provides a transition specialist who operates similar to an ombudsman. The transition specialist is a vital member of the Youth rehabilitation team, providing continuity of services after release. This is done by ensuring Youth are promptly re-enrolled in their home school and providing on going monitoring of their attendance. Youth also receive assistance signing up with health insurance which provides for continuance of counseling and rehabilitation services, ensuring the Youth maintain continuity of treatment and services after their release.

All programs operate on an evidence based, positive reinforcement, point based platform that awards points for achievements and good behavior. Points can be used to purchase special snacks or participate in reward events such as staff sponsored BBQ's or popcorn and movie nights.

Youth serving long-term sentences are placed in the on-site "Camp Program", by the Courts. This program provides opportunities for positive behavior rewards:

- 1) Driver's Licenses
- 2) Dual enrollment in GREC and Columbia Community College

- 3) Job training and placement assistance through the Mother Lode Job Training program
- 4) Ability to earn off campus furloughs for job interviews and special family events (weddings, birthdays and funerals)
- 5) Youth with children can earn 4 hr. Furloughs, to bond and develop a positive relationship with their child

A popular goal of the “Camp Program” is to earn Judges Honor Roll (JHR). JHR Youth look forward to earning “Dinner with the Judge”. The Judge that placed them in the “Camp Program” brings a special meal, often fast food, to share one on one. Taking the time to talk, eat and get to know them. The Judge may choose to take the Youth on an off-campus field trip, such as to Starbucks or for an ice cream. The Youth are very proud when the Judge takes time to come visit and get to know them better, demonstrating that they and their rehabilitation success are important to the Court. This can be very powerful rehabilitation reinforcement. Prior to building the MLRJDF, incarcerated Youths were housed outside of Tuolumne County, mostly in Nevada County. Locating the MLRJDF in Tuolumne County provides the County with quality rehabilitation programs for local teens at risk and allows for family support.

Utilizing the County Probation Department’s business manager, MLRJDF has been able to maximize their grant funding, thus providing another cost savings to the County. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the 2023-2024 operating expenses for this facility are offset by revenue from partnering agency contracts and grants from State and other government agencies. If the local Youth currently housed in the MLRJDF were to be housed out of county, the cost to Tuolumne County would be approximately \$1,131,500. annually. This does not include the manpower costs for a probation officer to transport those Youth, to and from court. The current cost to the county general fund to operate the MLRJDF (including housing, manpower and all rehabilitation programs) is only \$961,926. - a 15% savings.

The MLRJDF has boasted a very robust volunteer programs: 4H, academic tutors, library services, vocational training, cosmetology services and religious services. Due to lack of volunteers, currently only religious services are offered.

COMMENDATIONS

The Civil Grand Jury was pleased to find all three facilities’ administration and staff to be very dedicated to working with the incarcerated. These facilities make significant contributions to Tuolumne County by providing employment opportunities, comprehensive rehabilitation for incarcerated county youth and by employee involvement in community charitable activities. They meet, if not exceed, the requirements for detention of inmates by providing rehabilitation, education, vocational and behavioral programs that combat recidivism thus reducing repeat crime in the county. The MLRJDF demonstrates financial responsibility by utilizing state and federal grant funding as well as outside contracts.