



2023-24 GRAND JURY REPORT  
EL DORADO COUNTY  
APRIL 5, 2024 CASE #24-03

PLACERVILLE AND SOUTH LAKE TAHOE  
JAIL INSPECTIONS

*The 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury conducted its annual inspections of the county jails located in South Lake Tahoe and Placerville.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Contents

Summary	3
Background	4
Methodology	5
Discussion	6
South Lake Tahoe Jail	8
Placerville Jail	9

# SUMMARY

## Summary

The 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury conducted its annual inspections of the county jails located in South Lake Tahoe and Placerville. The inspections included a physical inspection of the facilities as well as interviews with staff and inmates.

Both jails were well maintained. There are no issues with the physical facilities. Steps should be taken to improve medical care, recruitment, and retention of qualified staff.

# BACKGROUND

## Background

Each year, the Grand Jury in each California county is mandated by Penal Code (PC) Section 919(b) to “... inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” The term “public prisons” was recently clarified in a California Attorney General (AG) Opinion (No. 18-103) dated March 10, 2022. The AG opined that the term “public prisons” in PC Section 919(b) includes “local detention facilities” that confine prisoners for more than 24 hours. A county or city jail is a typical example of such a local detention facility. The AG concluded that each Grand Jury must inquire into at least one local detention facility located within its county.

# METHODOLOGY

## Methodology

### Site Visits:

- Inspection of the South Lake Tahoe Jail in South Lake Tahoe was conducted on November 2, 2023
- Inspection of the El Dorado County Jail in Placerville was conducted on November 16, 2023

### Documents Reviewed:

- Prior El Dorado County Grand Jury Reports
- Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) 2020/2022 Biennial Inspection Report (Dated August 7, 2022)
- BSCC *Jails Inspection Handbook for Grand Jurors*
- California Grand Jury Association Detention Facility Inspection Form
- Fire Marshal Inspection Report dated November 23, 2022
- Environmental Health Evaluation dated October 19, 2022
- Nutritional Health Evaluation dated October 19, 2022
- Medical/Mental Health Evaluation dated December 15, 2022

### Interviews:

- El Dorado County Sheriff's Department staff
- Inmates at both facilities

# DISCUSSION

## Discussion

Inspections at both jails included housing, holding cells, medical units, culinary facilities, indoor and outdoor gym recreation facilities, and control rooms. The main control room monitors the entire facility including adjacent grounds. Separate control rooms monitor the housing units. Also inspected were the booking/intake area, public access areas, isolation cells, and the sally port, which is a secure entrance where inmates are brought into the jail and processed.

County jails were originally built to serve as pretrial detention centers and to house criminals sentenced to no more than one year. Those subject to longer sentences were sent to state prison. County jails were not designed to house prisoners serving long-term sentences.

In 2011, the Public Safety Realignment Act [Assembly Bill (AB) 109], reduced California's overcrowded prison system by moving lower-level offenders to county jails. Consequently, counties became responsible for incarceration and all ancillary services related to long-term incarceration. Prior to AB 109, criminals were sent to state prison or county jail based on length of sentence.

Inmates are classified on various factors to determine the housing unit where they will be assigned. The housing units, referred to as pods, house inmates depending on their ability to associate with others. Some inmates are housed in isolation, based on their criminal charges, combativeness, gang affiliation, mental state, and other issues that could make them a danger to others. Inmates with mental health issues are not segregated unless a safety and/or behavioral issue arises.

Officers monitor all pods from control rooms 24 hours a day. Each control room contains monitors showing all activity in each pod. From the control room, officers can remotely lock/unlock individual cells and give inmates directions by intercom.

## DISCUSSION

The El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE) offers a wide range of educational classes at both facilities, including court-ordered narcotics and alcohol abuse treatment and anger management. Inmates can complete General Educational Development (GED) requirements, giving them an alternative to a high school diploma.

Inmates have numerous activities in which they may participate. They all have access to computer tablets for education and entertainment purposes. Permission to use the tablets depends on an inmate's good behavior. Inmates may join religious services within the jail, or they can request a visit from a clergy member. Both facilities allow inmates to exercise in the yard for one hour, three times per week.

Both jails have culinary programs that have received many awards. To participate in the program, inmates must meet specific guidelines and complete a food safety course. Qualified candidates prepare daily meals under the supervision of a registered dietician and staff cook. Food storage and refrigerated areas at both jails were clean and well organized. Cleaning fluids and other chemicals were labeled properly and stored safely. Knives and other sharp instruments are counted and secured when not in use.

There is no contact visiting, meaning inmates are not allowed physical contact with their visitors. Inmates are allowed one-hour visits three times per week. Telephones are the only means of communication between inmates and visitors. Their conversations are conducted in a booth through a glass window and are monitored by staff.

An independent medical care provider contracts with the County to provide medical services to inmates at both jails. There is a Registered Nurse on duty during the day and a Licensed Vocational Nurse on duty at night. During our interviews, it was stated that this medical care provider is not always reliable.

The inspection team identified a few areas that the Sheriff's Office may want to follow up on:

## DISCUSSION

- The Grand Jury was informed that the current medical care provider cannot always be relied upon. Medical personnel do not always show up when expected. Additionally, an inmate at South Lake Tahoe informed us that they are not receiving their prescribed medications since being transferred to that facility. Perhaps a new medical care provider is warranted.
- Staffing at both facilities is a huge issue, causing a lot of overtime. Staff recruitment and retention efforts could be stepped up to help alleviate this issue.

### SOUTH LAKE TAHOE JAIL

The jail was originally built in 1973 and was modified in the 1980s. The jail was inspected on November 2, 2023. Inmates are classified into the following categories: general population, maximum security, administrative separation, and discipline separation. The maximum capacity of the facility is 158 inmates. On the date of inspection, it housed 107 inmates, 93 males and 14 females. The current inmates have been housed for 12 hours and up to 6 years. The last suicide was approximately 2 years ago. There have been no escapes.

Allocated staff positions are approximately 50% filled. As a result, existing staff work significant overtime to meet schedule demands. The staff said the primary reason for the staffing shortage is likely because jails in surrounding counties pay higher wages.

One male inmate and one female inmate were interviewed. Topics discussed included: inmate safety, treatment by staff, complaint procedures, legal and regulatory compliance, visitor policies, medical services, recreation, and leisure activities. The inmates felt safe and believed they were treated well by staff. The main complaint was that inmates wanted contact visitation.

Although the facility is showing signs of aging, it was clean, graffiti-free, and well maintained. Everything appeared to be in working order and well organized.



# DISCUSSION

## PLACERVILLE JAIL

The jail was built in 1988. The jail was inspected on November 16, 2023. Inmates are classified into the following categories: general population, maximum security, administrative separation, discipline separation, and special needs. The maximum capacity of the facility is 303 inmates. When inspected, it housed 188 inmates, 157 males and 31 females. There have been no successful suicides in 2023, however, there have been three attempts. There were no deaths or escapes in 2023.

The facility has 85 staff allocations, of which 64 are filled. This requires substantial overtime for the current staff. The facility currently has one cook, and on the day of inspection, he was on his 29<sup>th</sup> day of work without a day off. The main reason given for this understaffing is lower pay than in the surrounding counties.

One male inmate was interviewed. He worked in the kitchen and was happy working there. He did not have any major complaints but did want contact visitations.

The facility appeared clean, graffiti-free, and well maintained. Everything appeared to be in working order and organized.

A \$25 million grant, provided for under California Senate Bill 844, has allocated funds for the jail's expansion. The expansion includes a separate housing unit for female inmates, a new medical wing increasing bed capacity, construction of several ADA-compliant cells, technical and programming spaces, and a computer lab. There will not be an increase in the number of inmates the facility will be able to house. The site is adjacent to the current facility, and the land has been cleared. The construction project is pending various approvals.

Responses to this report are not required or requested.