



## **Madera County Jail**

**2425-01**

**Prepared by the**

**2024-2025 Madera County Grand Jury**

## SUMMARY

The management of the Madera County Jail changed from the Department of Corrections to the Sheriff's Office in 2021. The Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) aimed to determine the progress and success of this reunification.

The MCGJ conducted a tour of the Madera County Jail on October 24, 2024 and spoke to a wide range of Jail staff. The Jury found that recent changes made by the Sheriff's Office have fostered a more conducive environment, increased satisfaction in the workforce, and created a safer and more secure facility for staff and inmates. The MCGJ recommends that the Jail conduct a staffing analysis as well as develop a plan to rehabilitate an out-of-compliance module, to be able to continue in their path of growth and success.

## GLOSSARY

Jail: Madera County Jail

MCGJ: Madera County Grand Jury

BSCC: Board of State and Community Corrections

CSU: Classification Services Unit

ACE: Adverse Childhood Experiences

## BACKGROUND

The Madera County Jail is located at 14191 Road 28 in Madera, and has been in operation at this location since 1988. The capacity of the facility is 604 incarcerated persons and has not exceeded the capacity in the last year. In 2023, 40 new beds were added by converting single cells to double-bunk units. Bed capacity increased from 564 to 604 as of May 2024. At the time of the current MCGJ investigation, there were 462 inmates and 111 staff employed at the Jail. The Jail is a Type 2 facility which the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) defines as: *A local detention facility used for the detention of persons pending arraignment, during trial, and upon a sentence of commitment.* The average length of stay for sentenced inmates at the Jail is 20.6 days and 77.6 days for unsentenced inmates.

For over forty years, the Jail was overseen and managed by the Madera County Department of Corrections, after separating from the Sheriff's Office in 1978. During this time, Madera was one of only two county jail operations in California that were not under the purview of a county sheriff. In 2021, The Madera County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted and approved the reunification of the Madera County Department of Corrections and the Madera County Sheriff's Office, and the transfer of leadership to the elected Sheriff.

After this vote, the Sheriff's Office made a statement to the Madera Tribune detailing their thoughts on this change:

*"The Reunification of the Sheriff's Office and Department of Corrections is an incredible opportunity to improve services and efficacy by modernizing practices to better serve our community sheriff's office... By following the model of county law enforcement agencies throughout the state, we are positioning Madera County for future growth and success. We anticipate a seamless transition as we collaboratively implement reunification guidelines, with safety and efficiency as our focus."*

Having been over three years since the transition of the operations of the Jail from the Madera County Department of Corrections to the Madera County Sheriff's Office, the 2024-2025 MCGJ wanted to investigate the impact of this change, as well as the overall conditions of the Jail.

## **METHODOLOGY**

- Conducted an in-person tour of the Jail facility
- Interviewed Jail administration, staff, and inmates
- Reviewed the [Madera County Jail website](#)
- Reviewed the [Madera County Sheriff's Office Custody Manual](#)
- Reviewed the most recent [BSCC inspection reports](#)
- Reviewed prior [MCGJ reports](#)
- Reviewed submitted Citizen Complaint Forms relating to the Jail
- Reviewed [Pigeonly processes](#)
- Read Madera Tribune article: [County board approves sheriff's and corrections reunification](#)

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Positive changes for employees**

The MCGJ learned that recent changes to the Jail shift schedules initiated by the Sheriff's Office have had a positive impact on staff. Employees are now working twelve-hour shifts instead of eight-hour shifts, where overtime was a common necessary occurrence. Prior to the schedule change, up to six employees per day were held over to a second shift. Several staff members we spoke to said the frequently required overtime contributed to low morale, which often compounded the attendance and staffing issues. Employees now have a more reliable, predictable schedule and therefore better work-life balance. This positive change is reflected in the increase in employee daily attendance from 80% to 96%, and the decrease in turnover rate from 25% to 10%.

In the 2021-2022 response to the MCGJ report on the Jail, the Sheriff's Office reported that county correctional officer recruitment and retention was a challenge that the department is working aggressively to improve. Due to the changes implemented by the Sheriff's Office, morale has greatly increased. The Jail is not just retaining more employees, but also seeing a large increase in requests for lateral transfers which benefits the department and community in multiple ways. Lateral transfers do not require the expensive six-week academy training that is mandatory for new hires, saving the department money even after the \$15,000 signing bonus that is currently being offered. Lateral transfers also bring in their own unique set of skills and experiences that can be shared to help improve the facility. A report from the Sheriff's Office in December 2024 stated that the Jail is now the only fully staffed correctional facility in the Central Valley. In addition, 12 lateral correctional officers are on standby, ready to join the Madera team as soon as positions become available.

Employee physical and mental health is also being prioritized at the Jail. Both internal and external supportive services are now available to staff. Employees have access to a wellness app developed for the department, as well as several resources through their Employee Assistance Program. The Jail has developed a robust peer support program and has a psychologist in Fresno on retainer for those employees who prefer to seek outside mental health support. A new on-site employee gym and sauna with state-of-the-art equipment was funded by a grant and opened this year. The MCGJ observed friendly competition between staff, with motivational quotes posted throughout the gym. This demonstrates a team-building atmosphere that has a positive effect on morale. The Sheriff's Office also offers access to lifetime medical insurance to employees after five years of service.

Unlike some county jails in the Central Valley, where staff and inmates are separated by bars and glass, the Madera County Jail uses a direct supervision model where staff and inmates are always in direct contact. This requires a high level of mutual respect between staff and inmates. The Sheriff's Department spent over \$68,000 in 2023 (approximately a \$22,000 increase from 2019/2020) to provide extensive training in areas such as First Aid/CPR, Defensive Tactics, and Inmate Manipulation Tactics to ensure staff have the tools necessary to safely manage inmate behavior.

The Classification Services Unit (CSU) team reviews all incoming inmates' information and histories, and continuously monitors inmate's behaviors and grievances to provide appropriate housing and program schedules. The team is able to separate gang members and other inmates who would be unsafe together or need special attention, while still allowing social interactions with other inmates.

The Use of Force team at the Jail reviews reports of any use-of-force incidents, providing another layer of accountability. Although incarcerated inmate-on-inmate assaults, as well as inmate-on-staff assaults do still occasionally occur, staff at the Jail reported that the direct supervision model has been effective. The model helps significantly reduce problem inmate behavior that is commonly seen in jails by actively supervising inmates in the housing units, identifying problems in the early stages, and encouraging positive behavior through daily interactions.

Employees interviewed also shared that since the transition from Corrections to the Sheriff's Office, leadership has developed new job standards and detailed procedures that better define job duties. Roles have also been established offering potential promotional opportunities, peace officer status, and enhanced compensation for selected positions. The Sheriff's Office has initiated training and mentoring programs that include cross-training within departments, which builds comradery amongst peers. These changes were reported by employees to have created a sense of security and transparency.

### **Positive changes for the facility and inmates**

In 2024, the Jail updated its mail procedure and handling system to utilize a mail service provided by Pigeonly Corrections. Pigeonly processes all non-privileged mail, including letters, greeting cards, postcards, 4x6 photos, and unbound newsletters at a facility in Las Vegas, NV. Their processing center scans a digital color copy of the mail and sends it to the Jail for distribution in PDF form. Attorney mail and official documents can still be mailed directly to the Jail facility. Inmates are provided information on the mail procedure during intake, and can also be found in the Orientation Manual which is available in each housing module. Detailed information and instructions for those wanting to send mail can be found on the county website and is provided to visitors.

The use of Pigeonly has been effective in proactively stopping the flow of drugs into the facility. The Pigeonly mail system costs \$20,544 annually, and is funded by Community Corrections Partnership using realignment funding. The reduction of mail contraband in the Jail not only increases the safety of the staff and the inmates, potentially saving lives and eliminating the risk of an inmate overdose, but also saves money on any drug-related medical issues and reduces inmate violence. This has also reduced the burden of the internal investigation team, allowing them to focus on safe housing placements and responses to inmate grievances and incidences.

Since the transition to the Sheriff's Office, there has been a decrease in the number of in-custody deaths. A prior MCGJ Jail report published in 2022 reported six in-custody deaths within the 2021-2022 year. Since that report, a nurse position has been added to the intake process that provides a mental health screening to all incoming inmates. Since the most critical time for suicide risk is within the first 24 hours of booking, providing this during the intake process has had a positive impact. Only one in-custody death has occurred in the last two years since the transition to the Sheriff's Office. In-custody deaths are listed on the county website and per Senate Bill 519 are reported to the BSCC.

### **Current programs and services offered to inmates:**

The Jail offers various programs, classes, and services for the health and rehabilitation of inmates.

- Medical:

A Medical Director is onsite eight hours a week, and a Family Nurse Practitioner is onsite 40 hours a week. Both positions are on-call 24/7 for orders and guidance. Other nursing staff are onsite and available 24/7. Telehealth, specialist referrals, and Emergency Room services are utilized as needed.

- Mental Health:

Mental Health staff that offer counseling and medication services are available onsite during the weekday hours. There are staff available on-call after hours and on weekends as requested. Madera County Behavioral Health crisis services are available 24/7 should there be a need for immediate intervention.

- Education:

There is one full-time teacher available to provide onsite educational support for inmates through the Madera Unified School District. In addition, the Edovo Tablet Program offers High School Education/High School Equivalency and select college courses, as well as a wide range of education, personal and career development, and treatment courses. Time spent on educational programming through the Edovo Tablet Program is rewarded with points that can be used on entertainment such as music, movies, and games. In the 2023-2024 school year, 250 inmates attended the education program, and four students received a HiSET Equivalency Certificate. Individualized Education Program services are also available through Madera Adult School.

- Vocational Services:

The Jail offers two vocational programs and five certificates. GRID is a solar installation training program and IN2WORK is a food services training program. The Workforce Assistance Program offers a curriculum that teaches techniques for job searches, networking and interviewing, as well as employment assistance after release. Upon successful completion of the available programs, inmates can receive the following certifications: GRID Solar Installation Training Program Certificate, Installation Basics Training Array Certificate, Installation Basics Training Electrical Certificate, Workforce Transition Program Certificate, and a ServSafe Food Handlers Card.

- Religious services

A facility Chaplain is onsite Monday through Thursday from 8am-5pm and on-call for the remainder of the week. There are 14 faith-based volunteers who conduct Catholic, Protestant, and Jehovah Witness services. The Jail is currently in the process of bringing a Jewish Rabbi into the facility to conduct services. In the month of July 2024, 65 services were conducted with 538 inmates in attendance.

- Other programs:

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Overcomers Class is held Monday through Wednesday. This class aims to remediate the effects of ACEs which are prevalent among incarcerated populations.
- Narcotics Anonymous comes to the facility and offers weekly meetings which are held on Sundays.

### **Future impact:**

Continual changes to case law and new legislative mandates requiring policy and procedure updates are challenges that the Jail will always face. The most recent change that will likely impact the future of the Jail was the passing of Proposition 36 in November 2024. Proposition 36 allows felony charges and increased sentences for certain drug and theft charges. In some cases, those in possession of illegal drugs will be required to complete drug treatment or face prison time. While the Sheriff's Office works with the Madera County Superior Court and Madera County Parole Office to assist in managing the population of the Jail, additional bed space and an increase in staffing may be necessary in the near future. According to the Sheriff's Office, the staffing levels at the Jail have remained the same for over 20 years.

Past MCGJ reports and responses, from 2019-2020 and 2021-2022, have reported that grant funds ranging from 19-24 million dollars were awarded to the Jail provided by SB1022. These funds were intended to provide high-security beds to accommodate inmates with mental health, acute substance abuse, and other health concerns, as well as other renovations to the facility. These updates were expected to be completed in 2023, however, construction has been delayed due to lack of funds from the Madera County Board of Supervisors to match the required grant funding. At this time, a new plan has been created and the project is tentatively scheduled for November 2025. There are currently 84 individuals at the Jail with a mental health diagnosis.

At the time the Jail was built in 1988, it was not designed for long-term housing. Since the passing of AB 109 in 2011, the amount of time that inmates spend awaiting court and at the Jail has increased. At this time, there are inmates who have been at the Jail for years. This means that it is important to have all bed space available when needed. The MCGJ learned that one housing module (Module B) became out of compliance and was forced to close due to failing infrastructure and collapsing pipes.

Despite this investigation taking place in the middle of the holiday season, as well as during facility repairs on flooring, and in the midst of two critical incidents that took place in the county's jurisdiction, the Sheriff's Office and Jail staff were extremely accommodating and responsive to all of our questions. This showcases their dedication as public servants, and the MCGJ would like to commend them on their service to the community, as well as their accomplishments in the last year.

## **FINDINGS**

F1. The MCGJ finds that the transition of leadership from the Department of Corrections to the Sheriff's Office has been positive for both staff and inmates at the Madera County Jail.

F2. The MCGJ finds that despite legislative changes and the County's population growth, the staffing levels at the Jail have remained the same.

F3. The MCGJ finds that building renovations can help support the potential future growth of the Jail population.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. The MCGJ recommends that the Sheriff's Office continue to develop innovative ways to maintain employee morale and the high level of safety and security of the Jail. The Sheriff's Office should continue to provide regular updates to the Board of Supervisors regarding innovative developments within the Jail beginning 90 days after the MCGJ report posting.

R2. The MCGJ recommends that the Sheriff's Office work with the Board of Supervisors to conduct a staffing analysis now that the Jail is fully staffed and there are correctional officers available to join at any time. The staffing analysis should be completed by 90 days after the MCGJ report posting.

R3. The MCGJ recommends that the Sheriff's Office develop a plan to rehabilitate Module B, which should be completed and presented to the Board of Supervisors 90 days after the MCGJ report posting.

## **REQUEST FOR RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Madera County Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following elected officials within 90 days:

Office of the Madera County Sheriff  
2725 Falcon Drive  
Madera, CA 93637

Madera County Board of Supervisors  
200 West Fourth Street  
Madera, CA 93637

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Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends the provisions of Penal Code Section 929 prohibiting disclosure of witness identities to encourage full candor in testimony in Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.

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\* Note: This report was prepared using current information available on the websites listed.

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