



## **Central California Women's Facility**

**2425-05**

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**Prepared by the**

**2024-2025 Madera County Grand Jury**

## **SUMMARY**

Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) conducted an annual Detention Facility inspection at the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF) located at 23370 Road 22 in Chowchilla, CA on September 10, 2024. The MCGJ met with Command staff and inspected the condition of the prison grounds, buildings, and facilities. After the inspection, the MCGJ met with the Warden who answered questions and provided an overview of the facility and programs.

The CCWF is a level one through level four facility, which is a minimum to maximum security women’s facility. The prison no longer has inmates on death row. The California Senate bill (SB960) effectively ended the segregation of death row inmates. Therefore, Death row inmates were transitioned to the general population. The capacity of the facility is 2,756 inmates, and the population on September 10, 2024, was 2,107 which is within California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) guidelines.

## **GLOSSARY/ABBREVIATIONS**

CALPIA - California Prison Industry Authority  
CCWF - Central California Women’s Facility  
CCCMS - Correctional Clinical Case Management Services  
CDCR - California Department of Corrections  
DPP - Disability Placement Program  
EOP - Enhanced Outpatient Program  
MCGJ - Madera County Grand Jury  
PREA - Prison Rape Prevention/Elimination Act  
PUPS - Puppies Uplifting Prisoner’s Spirits  
R&R - Receiving and Release  
RVR - Rules Violation Report

## **METHODOLOGY**

- Conducted facility inspection
- Reviewed CCWF policy and procedure manual
- Reviewed LA Times article “Can California change a dark culture at Chowchilla women’s prison?” Dated December 19, 2024

- Reviewed previous MCGJ final reports
- Reviewed CDCR's Contraband Interdiction Efforts
- Reviewed The California Model

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Staffing:**

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) Division of Adult Institutions establishes minimum staffing standards to ensure safe and effective operation of correctional facilities. These standards allow for variable staffing levels based on institutional design, special programming needs and inmate custody levels. Additional staffing changes are also made to accommodate the various healthcare requirements of the inmate population.

### **Local and State Safety Inspections:**

Quarterly fire inspections are conducted at the institution and were up to date at the time of the MCGJ inspection. The state also conducted comprehensive Medical and Mental Health inspections over several days. Additionally, an Environmental Health inspection was conducted and no violations or concerns were documented or observed during any of these inspections.

### **Orientation of Inmates:**

All inmates arriving at Receiving and Release (R&R) are given a briefing and orientation packet, which includes a Prison Rape/Elimination Act (PREA) brochure and a self-assessment guide which helps to gauge their level of education, language skills, and maturity. The inmates are shown a video and given an explanation concerning PREA. Inmates are also given instructions on how to report witnessing or being a victim of sexual violence. Safety issues are also addressed with the inmates. A Disability Placement Program (DPP), a 602 grievance, and an 1824 Reasonable Accommodation Request are explained.

## **Health Care:**

The healthcare needs of the inmate population are addressed within seven days of arrival and a follow-up 14 to 30 days if needed. Services are provided by a team of Physicians, Registered Nurses, Physicians Assistants, OB/GYNs, Licensed

Psychiatrists, and Nurses Aides. There are two mental health programs provided at CCWF. Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP) outlines the rules and guidelines for inmate care, safety, and treatment and provides weekly individual therapy and a minimum of ten hours of group treatment. Correctional Clinical Case Management Services (CCCMS) provides individual therapy for 30 to 90 days. Inmates requiring trauma awareness services are routed to an acute care hospital. Inmates also have access to Behavioral Health Services provided by psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, recreational therapists, and predoctoral interns.

## **Conditions of Grounds:**

The areas surrounding the housing units are primarily composed of dirt and gravel. In compliance with the California governor's drought mandate, the landscaping around the Administration Building features drought-resistant vegetation.

The exterior of most of the buildings inspected were well-maintained without signs of damage. The interior of most of the buildings inspected were clean. While inspecting building C, the MCGJ observed multiple moldy, missing and water-stained ceiling tiles. Several air vents were covered with a mold-like substance. These conditions have been documented in the MCGJ report from 2023-24.

## **Housing:**

Inmates are housed at a maximum of eight persons per cell. The cells viewed were clean and organized. Each cell had four bunk beds, eight lockers, two sinks with mirrors, one toilet and one shower. Linens on the bunks and towels hanging on lockers appeared to be clean and tidy. Correctional Officers conduct daily random searches of inmate rooms for contraband.

## **Discipline of Inmates:**

Inmate violations are managed through a progressive discipline system. The California Code of Regulations, Title 15 outlines the rules and guidelines for inmate care,

safety and treatment. This approach is designed to correct behavior through escalating interventions while ensuring fairness and due process.

**The process includes three main steps:**

- **Verbal Warning** – Minor infractions are initially addressed with a verbal warning, intended to provide immediate correction and an opportunity for the inmate to adjust their behavior without formal documentation.
- **Counseling** – If the behavior persists or the initial violation warrants more attention, a counseling session is conducted. During this step the staff documents the incident and counsels the inmate on expected behavior and potential consequences of continued non-compliance.
- **Rules Violation Report (RVR)** – For repeated misconduct or more serious violations, a formal Rules Violation Report is issued. The RVR includes a written account of the incident and the inmate is afforded due process, which may include an investigation, a disciplinary hearing and the opportunity to present evidence or call witnesses.

Each step is documented and reviewed to ensure accountability and consistency. The progressive discipline model aims to encourage behavioral improvement while maintaining institutional safety and order.

The CDCR is implementing the “California Model.” The California Model refers to a transformative approach to criminal justice reform being implemented by the CDCR. This model draws inspiration from Scandinavian prison systems, particularly those in Norway, and emphasizes rehabilitation, humane treatment, and successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals into society.

**Personal Appearance and Attitude Of Inmates:**

Throughout the institution, inmates were properly dressed, well groomed and appeared to be using proper hygiene. The MCGJ interviewed several inmates who spoke highly of the institution and its various programs for their rehabilitation with an upbeat and positive attitude.

## **Dental Manufacturing:**

The CCWF hosts a dental manufacturing program operated by the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA). Established in August 1992, this dental laboratory provides services to the CDCR, Juvenile Detention and various state and county hospitals. The lab produces a range of dental products, including prosthetics, custom trays, night guards, partial and full dentures and cast metal frameworks.

Incarcerated individuals at CCWF receive training in dental laboratory techniques, gaining skills that can aid in their rehabilitation and employment prospects upon release. This program is part of CCWF's broader vocational offerings, which aim to provide inmates with valuable job skills .

## **Eyeglass Manufacturing:**

### **Overview of the Optical Program at CCWF**

The optical lab at CCWF commenced full operations in August 2022, following renovations and equipment upgrades that began in 2018. It now trains approximately 125 incarcerated individuals in various aspects of optical manufacturing .

Participants receive hands-on experience with both traditional and automated lens surfacing technologies. The program, in collaboration with the American Board of Opticianry, offers certifications that prepare individuals for roles such as opticians, lab technicians, and lab managers upon reentry into the community.

The lab produces prescription eyewear primarily for California's Medi-Cal program, serving low-income residents. CALPIA's optical facilities, including those at CCWF, Valley State Prison, and California State Prison in Solano, fulfill these orders.

## **Impact and Considerations**

### **Rehabilitation and Employment:**

By providing marketable skills, the program aims to reduce recidivism and facilitate successful reintegration into society. A 2021 study by the University of California, Irvine, found that only 15% of CALPIA program participants returned to custody within three years, indicating a positive impact on post-release outcomes .

## **Educational Programs:**

The CCWF has 25 credentialed teachers in the educational department. Classes offered are Adult Basic Education 1 (1st-3rd grades), 2 (4th-6th grades), 3 (7th-9th grades), and high school GED, which are earned through Sierra Adult Education. The

AA degrees are earned through Merced City College. The BA and BS degrees are earned through Fresno State University, 55 GED, 9 high school diplomas and 30 associate degrees were obtained over the course of the last year.

## **Mail:**

Mail arriving from the Chowchilla Post Office to the CCWF mailroom is processed and delivered to the inmates within seven days. All mail is scanned, screened, opened and read. Any mail found to contain suspicious messages or contraband is immediately delivered to a custody officer within the mailroom. The CDCR faces challenges related to the smuggling of illegal narcotics through the mail system.

## **Methods of Smuggling Narcotics via Mail:**

Individuals have attempted to introduce contraband into correctional facilities by disguising drug-laden mail as legal correspondences. For instance, in 2022, a federal inmate and an accomplice were indicted for conspiring to distribute controlled substances by labeling packages as “legal mail” to evade detection.

## **CDCR's Contraband Interdiction Efforts**

To combat such smuggling attempts, CDCR has implemented several measures:

- **Mail Screening:** All incoming mail is subject to inspection for contraband. Non-confidential mail may be reviewed, and confidential mail is inspected in the presence of the inmate without reading the contents.
- **Canine Units:** Trained canine teams are deployed to search various areas, including mailrooms, for narcotics and other contraband. However, audits have revealed inconsistent utilization of these canine teams across facilities.
- **Policy Development:** CDCR is mandated to develop comprehensive policies addressing contraband interdiction, applicable to all individuals entering detention facilities.

## Challenges and Recommendations

### Despite these efforts, challenges persist:

- **Underutilization of Resources:** Audits have highlighted that canine teams, though effective, are not consistently used to their full potential. The Canine units are rotated through the entire California penal system.
- **Evolving Smuggling Techniques:** Smugglers continuously adapt their methods, necessitating ongoing updates to detection strategies.

### To enhance interdiction efforts, recommendations include:

- **Enhanced Training:** Providing regular training for staff on the latest smuggling tactics and detection methods.
- **Policy Enforcement:** Ensuring consistent application of interdiction policies across all facilities.

For more detailed information on CDCR's contraband interdiction policies and efforts, you can refer to their official documentation and audit reports. (See Methodology)

### Family Visiting:

Weekly visits for inmates are held in one of two visiting rooms in the institution. Visiting days are Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Visits with family are up to six hours in length. All visitors must be pre-approved and screened before entering the institution. Family conjugal visits are determined by the inmate's counselor based on their behavior. The inmate must apply for the conjugal visit. These visits are only granted every 90 days.

### Puppies Uplifting Prisoner's Spirits (PUPS):

Inmates that participate in the PUPS program become full-time trainers/handlers. Inmates with no record of harm to animals or others and without any discipline issues can apply to the PUPS program. The assigned dogs live in the cell with the trainer/handler. In each eight-person cell, up to three dogs and three trainers/handlers share the space. The dogs sleep in crates. The dogs are trained to respond to commands and changes in the trainer/handler's emotions. The dogs leave the facility

after 18 months for further training at the San Diego Little Angels training facility. When fully trained, the dogs will provide mobility and stabilizing assistance, serve as diabetic alerts and seizure-alert dogs. The staff highlighted the positive impact the PUPS program has had on the inmate trainer/handlers, the staff and the administration.

## **FINDINGS**

F1. The MCGJ finds that the housing units at CCWF had missing ceiling tiles, water-stained and moldy vents.

F2. The MCGJ finds that the CCWF has implemented progressive rehabilitation programs for inmates.

F3. The MCGJ finds that the PUPS program is a benefit for trainers/handlers, staff, administration and the community.

F4. The MCGJ finds that staff in the mail room at the CCWF failed to use appropriate personal protective equipment when handling incoming mail. This lapse in safety practices potentially exposes both staff and inmates to harmful substances or contaminants.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. The MCGJ recommends that maintenance be conducted to replace and fix the missing and water stained ceiling tiles and vents in CCWF.

R2. The MCGJ recommends that the warden continue to research and implement innovative and progressive rehabilitative programs for the inmates within CCWF.

R3. The MCGJ recommends CCWF continue to offer and expand the PUPS program for the benefit of trainers/handlers, staff, administration and the community.

R4. The MCGJ recommends that CCWF establish and enforce stricter safety protocols in the mail room, including mandatory personal protective equipment usage, regular training on handling potentially hazardous materials and routine audits to ensure compliance.

## INVITED RESPONSES

**Invited Respondents:** Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury invites responses as follows: From the following governing bodies within 90 days:

Central California Women's Facility  
23370 Road 22  
Chowchilla Ca. 93610

Warden CCWF  
Central California Women's Facility  
23370 Road 22  
Chowchilla, CA 93610

Governor Gavin Newsom  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95841

BSCC  
2590 Venture Oaks Way, Suite 200  
Sacramento, CA 95833

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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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