

INSPECTION REPORT FOR CALIFORNIA MEN’S COLONY

This report summarizes the observations and findings of the 2017-2018 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury, based upon a two-day inspection of the California Men’s Colony (CMC), an examination of policies and procedures, and answers to questions submitted to the staff at CMC.

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

As required by state penal code, the Grand Jury annually inspects all public prisons, including state prisons. The Grand Jury visited The State of California Men’s Colony (CMC) over a two-day period. One day was spent at the East facility, with concentration on the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) factories and the new medical Correctional Treatment Center (CTC). The second day included the inspection of the West facility with a concentration on the programming areas. For each inspection, members of the Grand Jury toured the facility and inspected both the physical plant and the processes and procedures. The following areas and processes were the primary concentration: housing, feeding, transporting, assessing the medical and mental health status of the inmates, medical treatment, and behavioral health treatment. CMC management also answered a set of written questions, primarily about policies and the CALPIA factories.

ORIGIN

This report is the result of the required annual inspection of CMC.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code § 919(b) mandates “The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.”

METHOD/PROCEDURE

The Grand Jury performed a physical inspection at the prison by touring and interviewing various officials during the visits. During the site inspections, the survey instrument found in Appendix A was used to gather information.

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- Inspection reports completed by the California Board of State and Community Corrections
- Local media coverage of the CMC unrest during this time period
- CMC policies and procedures
- CMC answers to written questions submitted to CMC by the Grand Jury

HISTORY

The Grand Jury inspects CMC each year and normally includes the inspection report as part of its final report. Previous reports had noted the noise levels at the CALPIA factories were sufficient to cause hearing loss.

NARRATIVE

The focus of this year's CMC inspection was on the CALPIA factories using inmate labor, the prison programming to prevent recidivism of inmates, and the medical and mental health treatment of inmates.

OBSERVATIONS FROM CMC INSPECTIONS

CMC East

The CMC East facility is a Level III medium security prison located in San Luis Obispo County. It contains the CTC located near the front entrance of CMC East facility. The CTC provides both medical and mental health treatment for inmates from CMC and other State prisons. It was built in 2016 and is a modern, well maintained facility. The mental health capacity is 50 beds distributed as 25 beds on the A and B sides. The facility is full and there is a statewide waiting list for admission. Inmates requiring administrative segregation are not treated at this facility because of safety

concerns. The Grand Jury did not visit the Administrative Segregation Medical Facility. Telephones are available within CTC for inmates to talk to persons outside the prison. All CTC employees receive a 20-hour course in crisis resolution.

Staff on duty includes five psychiatric technicians during the day plus a registered nurse and several licensed therapists/counselors and aides. The psychiatrist makes rounds once each day and is on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The counselors see each inmate daily in individual sessions and as part of a 90-minute group session. The inmates also have 90 minutes of yard time each day. There are no cameras with views into the CTC cells, but monitoring by the staff is increased if the inmate is deemed suicidal. A color-coded magnetic placard is placed on the outside of the cells indicating if extra monitoring is required.

The CTC has a separate kitchen with a dietitian, two cooks and two inmate helpers. Normal maintenance at the CTC is provided through CALPIA-trained and monitored inmates. CTC has not experienced an illegal drug problem, but has noted inmates swallowing nails, razor blades or other dangerous items in attempts to injure themselves. There were no suicides in 2017, but several attempts were made. The CTC has a secure pharmacy room where drugs are stored and dispensed as needed. The Grand Jury observed that the room security procedures were strictly followed.

There are four crisis rooms in CTC. These rooms have beds and little else. They are secure rooms where inmates experiencing a behavioral health crisis can be placed, providing a quiet, safe environment for the inmate. There are also isolation rooms available if the inmate has an infectious disease. The isolation rooms have a pressure system to prevent contaminated air from being mixed with outside air prior to it being treated. There is also a locked medical facility at Twin Cities Hospital (in Templeton) for inmates who require long-term medical care or surgery. The prison provides transportation to this facility as well as to other medical facilities. There are normally several hundred transports per month.

Incidents of violence toward CTC staff occur a few times each year. Inmates who tend toward violence to themselves or others are placed in protective smocks which envelope the inmate in padding thereby reducing the chance that they can become violent. These smocks wrap entirely

around the inmate, pinning their arms within the smock. These devices are used for added safety especially during transport within the facility.

The CMC facility was not originally designed to house high level inmates, such as the level III and IV prisoners that it currently serves. The cells and the buildings within CMC East are clearly very old and, in most cases, rundown. As a result of overcrowding lawsuits, most of the cells have places for two beds with only one occupied. After the implementation of AB 109, the prison inmate population has been reduced from approximately 8000 to about 4100.

There are two guard towers within CMC East that are manned 24 hours a day. Guards outside the towers are generally not armed. Guns are available in lockers near the entrance of each building and can be accessed if the safety of the correctional officers (CO's) requires armed intervention. Normally, CO's carry a defensive device, such as pressurized pepper spray, in a holster on their belts.

Many rehabilitative programs are available to inmates, but many inmates do not use them. These programs include college classes from Cuesta College, GED completion and CALPIA employment. There is also a library in the CMC East facility. It accepts donations of paperback books, meeting specified criteria. There are several prefab facilities under construction within the prison. Each of these will have room for up to 32 beds. The chapel in the "B" quadrant is currently under construction which includes the replacement of its roof. A previous Grand Jury report noted significant mold in this facility, presumably caused by roof and window leaks. This chapel is used for all religious services with each denomination having a scheduled service time.

There are smaller CTCs in each quadrant of buildings. These handle minor injuries and routine check-ups. Major medical issues often require transport to Twin Cities or--in emergencies-- to Sierra Vista. All transported inmates are accompanied by a CO. Emergencies are transported via commercial ambulance. Inmates can also be sent to Atascadero State Hospital, when required.

There are several CALPIA facilities within CMC East. The shoe factory and the printing mill were inspected by this Grand Jury. Both facilities were running at minimum capacity because of the

lockdown condition caused by the riot that had occurred a few weeks prior to the inspection. There were only 25 of the normal 79 workers in the shoe factory. Most of the loudest machines were not operating, so the noise level was not what previous inspections had noted. The CALPIA staff were unable to answer many of the questions asked by the Grand Jury. Most of these questions were subsequently answered in response to our written questions.

The local superintendent told the Grand Jury that there is a plan to install sound suppression panels near the loudest machines to reduce the overall noise level within the factory. The implementation of this plan is contingent upon granting of the funding request. Hearing test are performed on workers annually to determine if hearing loss is present. The buildings which house the CALPIA factories are old and as such do not comply with current fire and safety standards.

The final area inspected in CMC East was the food preparation areas in the kitchen. The kitchen services the East facility, with the exception of the CTC. Food is prepared by the inmates and supervisors and transported to dining areas, to be served within three hours of preparation.

When asked why the proportion of black inmates was so high, the CMC staff noted that the disproportional number of black inmates at CMC is because black inmates are not housed in central valley prison facilities, due to susceptibility to Valley Fever.

CMC West

The CMC West facility is a level I and II prison, housing inmates requiring less security than the CMC East facility. The level I area is strictly for low custody inmates. Inmates from this area are used for a variety of maintenance activities throughout CMC and are permitted in areas where Level II, and III inmates are not. The fire support facility, called Camp Cuesta, is in the level I area. Qualified inmates from this area provide fire-fighting and support nearly every day. A point system is used by CMC to determine the classification of inmates. CMC houses primarily Level I, II, and III inmates. Occasionally a limited number of Level IV inmates are housed in CMC East. This is normally temporary and includes inmates being transferred. Each quarter all inmates are evaluated by CMC staff to determine if they are assigned to the proper area, based upon points accumulated.

Points are given to inmates for rules infractions or improper behavior. Some crimes carry a minimum number of points that can prevent an inmate from ever achieving a Level I rating.

The Grand Jury toured the area where inmates train service dogs to support veterans with PTSD. These are Level II inmates, and the dogs live in the barracks with their assigned handlers. These dogs are trained as service dogs with the support of CO's who have experience with this type of training. The inmates expressed great satisfaction with this programming. The staff works in association with outside agencies and veterinary clinics to provide animals and staff training as well as placing animals.

The Grand Jury next inspected the West Facility Medical and Mental Health Clinic. This facility is old and run down and appears to be a World War II vintage building. This is in sharp contrast to the CTC facility in CMC East. It must be noted, however, that the CTC facility is for inmates with much more serious medical and mental health issues. The healthcare staff stated that (unlike the CTC facility) there has been a growing problem with fentanyl and other opioid abuse over the past several years, at this facility and throughout the country.

Overall the CMC West facility is clean and well maintained considering it consists mostly of older, WWII vintage buildings. There are, however, a few new buildings and several currently under construction. The older buildings, including dormitories, do present a significant fire hazard. The staff and the inmates are aware of this hazard and take appropriate precautions. Inmates at the CMC West facility have significantly more freedom to move around within their assigned areas than their counterparts at CMC East. The Grand Jury inspected one of the dormitories. It was orderly but crowded. It houses 50 or more inmates in a long open area. They have bunk beds and metal lockers for each inmate. This environment is distinct from CMC East cells and provides more freedom, but significantly less privacy.

The Grand Jury also inspected the classroom and therapy area and viewed inmates in various group counseling programs. The programs primarily address behavioral health issues such as substance abuse and anger management. There were also a variety of education-based programs being offered. The primary goal of all of these programs is to prepare inmates to return to society.

The Grand Jury spoke with inmates concerning these programs. One inmate completed a 17-month counseling program and is now a certified mentor for other inmates. His mentoring is primarily for substance abuse and anger management. He presented himself very well during the interview and spoke about his desire to continue his education and pursue a related career should he be paroled sometime in the future. Of the 30 inmates recently in the program, 29 passed the entire program successfully.

The inmates also have the ability to look for potential halfway houses and employment opportunities in the areas where they will be released. They are not, however, permitted to browse the internet or send emails. The staff noted that only the Governor can grant parole. Parole boards make recommendations to him. Qualified potential parolees have their cases reviewed by various senior staff members from the prison system and a Board of Commissioners also makes recommendations to the Governor.

The CMC West facility kitchen and dining area was also inspected. It is much cleaner and better maintained than the corresponding facility at CMC East, even though the building is vintage WWII construction and over 70 years old. A new kitchen is currently under construction; following its completion, the current building will be replaced.

CONCLUSIONS

While the East and West facilities are under common management, their inmates and environments are quite distinct. The East facility is a higher security prison, where inmates are locked in cells and generally controlled most of the day. Their programming options are significant, but the vocational training in the CALPIA factories seems to be the most common endeavor. The West facility houses inmates requiring less security and provides them with freedoms commensurate with their status. They more actively participate in programming aimed at benefiting them after their release back into society. They seem to be working toward parole or release rather than just passing time. This parallels the distinctions at our County jail, between the main jail and the honor farm.

FINDINGS

- F1. The CALPIA factories in the East facility areas have significant deficiencies in fire and safety standards due to their age and the codes at the time they were built.
- F2. The dog training in the West facility is enthusiastically supported by both staff and inmates.
- F3. There is adequate incentive for prisoners to participate in programming classes and sessions.
- F4. There is sufficient time for the programs to be effective prior to prisoner eligibility for release.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury has no recommendations for CMC as a result of this investigation.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

No responses are required.