

**A REPORT BY
THE 2014-2015 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY**
725 Court Street
Martinez, California 94553

Report 1508

**The Underutilization of the Marsh Creek
Detention Facility**

Overcrowding at the Martinez Detention Facility

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY:

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JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1508
The Underutilization of the Marsh Creek Detention Facility
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TO: The Contra Costa County Sheriff

SUMMARY

Contra Costa County owns 164 acres of rural land at the eastern foot of Mt. Diablo, approximately 5.5 miles south of downtown Clayton. The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office (SO) maintains a law enforcement shooting range and safety training area at the site.

The minimum-security Marsh Creek Detention Facility (MCDF) was built on 32 acres on the north side of the property in 1942. The male-only facility has the capacity to house 160 inmates, but is underutilized by almost 70%. There are two reasons for the underutilization:

1. Inmates with cardiac/pulmonary issues, diabetes, intense allergies and asthma, cannot be housed at the MCDF because they need access to emergency care and the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC, the "County Hospital") is over 20 miles away. Additionally, it is unsuitable for such inmates because many of the daily activities are outdoors, the infirmary is not open at night or on the weekends and there is no pharmacy on-site.
2. The facility lacks perimeter cameras and inmates can escape by climbing over the fences. Thus, the facility is not suitable for un-sentenced pre-trial inmates who are viewed as a flight risk.

Despite MCDF's minimum security, there has been no inmate escape in years. Due to minimum misconduct by inmates, the facility is staffed by a lone deputy on the night shift. A variety of vocational classes and the rural setting provide restorative benefits. The Grand Jury has been told that both deputies and inmates consider being assigned to MCDF a privilege.

In contrast, the overcrowded four-story Martinez Detention Facility (also referred to as the County Jail) is situated on one square block of downtown Martinez. The Martinez Detention Facility houses approximately 636 inmates per day on three of the four floors (One floor is used for administration). There are no classes or vocational training at the Martinez Detention Facility and inmates eat their meals in their cells. Staff report that inmate-to-inmate violence has increased 50% over the last year. In March, one inmate took a female guard hostage for several hours before releasing her unharmed.

California State Senate Bill 863 authorizes \$500 million to non-rural counties for jail construction. The SO intends to apply for \$90 million, which it will use to construct a 240-bed mental health wing at the West County Detention Facility. This increased capacity will relieve overcrowding at the Martinez Detention Facility. If the SO's application is granted, construction will be completed by 2019. If the SO is unsuccessful, the crowding at the Martinez Detention Facility could be relieved by obtaining alternative funding.

Crowding at the Martinez Detention Facility could also be relieved if the SO renovates the permeable wood floors of the two abandoned dormitory wings at the MCDF and opens the dormitories for occupancy. So that more men might have the opportunity to rehabilitate in the MCDF setting, the SO could also add more medical personnel during evenings and weekends so that the inmate classification could be broadened.

METHODOLOGY

Detention facility tours.
Interviews with county personnel.
Prison rehabilitation research and review.

INITIAL FINDINGS

Comparison of the Martinez Detention Facility and the Marsh Creek Detention Facility.

The Martinez Detention Facility

Pursuant to Penal Code §919(b), "The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons in the county". The 2014 - 2015 Grand Jury toured the County's adult and juvenile county detention facilities. There is a marked difference between the Martinez Detention Facility and MCDF.

The Martinez Detention Facility is usually the first point of contact for people arrested in the County. After people are booked and assessed at the Martinez Detention Facility, they are housed there until they are released, have been tried and sentenced, or are transferred to another facility. The Martinez Detention Facility is also adjacent to the

courts and administration for the SO.

Inmates who have medical or mental health issues are housed at the Martinez Detention Facility because of its proximity to CCRMC in Martinez.

Of the three adult detention centers in the County - the Martinez Detention Facility, the MCDF and the West County Detention Facility (WCDF) - the Martinez Detention Facility houses the most violent inmates. Those who are a danger to society and/or to themselves must serve their sentences in a highly-secured facility. Gang violence is also a security concern. Gang inmates exact revenge on rival gang members as well as men in the same gang. This makes congregating all inmates for classes or meals impossible. Staff must coordinate the inmates so that rivals are not in contact with each other during free time. Inmate-to-inmate violence is on the rise at the Martinez Detention Facility.

The Martinez Detention Facility was never intended to house inmates for a long period of time, but due to state-mandated prison realignment in 2011, inmates can be in custody for years while awaiting trial. Inmates are doubled-up in the interior cells and are allowed to leave their cells for only one to three hours per day. Maximum security inmates are allowed to leave their cells for one hour and ten minutes *every other day*. Outside areas are rectangular cement slabs surrounded by high walls. Inmates eat meals in their cells. There is no dedicated space for classes.



A double cell at the Martinez
Detention Facility



The Martinez Detention Facility in
Downtown Martinez



The Outside Courtyard of
the Q Wing at the Martinez
Detention Facility

The Marsh Creek Detention Facility

MCDF, built in 1942 at the foot of Mt. Diablo in Clayton, has capacity for 160 inmates. Its population fluctuates between 30 and 80 inmates, averaging approximately 50 inmates daily. There has not been an escape in years even though inmates could throw a blanket or mattress on the razor wire and climb over the fence. The staff reports that there are minimal behavioral conflicts among inmates. One deputy is assigned for the night shift and the property lacks security cameras. The inmates spend their days tending to the landscape and cultivating grape vineyards for commercial production. They prepare food, take classes to obtain high school diplomas, learn job re-entry skills, and master woodworking. There are substance abuse rehabilitation classes as well as stress management classes. In addition to a lending library and basketball courts, there is a chapel that provides weekly spiritual services for all denominations.



The Marsh Creek Detention Facility



Classroom Buildings at
the MCDF



The MCDF "D" Wing
and Outside
Courtyard



The Grounds of the
MCDF



The MCDF Vineyards

Inmate Rehabilitation

For certain inmates who have already been sentenced and are not at risk of escaping, MCDF's monastery-like setting provides a unique opportunity to rehabilitate. Stress reduction and mental restoration are benefits associated with living near green areas and spending time in natural settings. Research demonstrates that gardens - similar to MCDF - provide opportunities to reconnect with nature and that this can be a catalyst to self-improvement. Prison gardens reduce violence, improve mental health, teach horticulture skills, and reduce recidivism rates.

Furthermore, residents of urban, low socioeconomic neighborhoods often experience chronic stress due to higher exposure to noise, violence, unemployment, and crime. Chronic stress, combined with little opportunity for recovery, can lead to unhealthy levels of psychological and physiological reaction. Individuals experiencing chronic stress are more likely to suffer from impaired memory, sleep problems, loss of appetite, poor mental health, cardiovascular complications, and Type II diabetes.

Inmates spend a large portion of everyday working outdoors at the MCDF. Research shows that the human body's systems respond quickly to contact with nature. Experiencing nature can inspire feelings of contemplation, impressions that are reinforced by calmed heart rate, reduced stress response and healing processes. (See Appendix A)

Ways to Increase Occupancy at the MCDF

Four of the six dormitory wings at MCDF are uninhabited. Wings A and B are uninhabited due to unreinforced wooden floors and Wings E and F are uninhabited due to mold damage. The occupancy rate at MCDF is also limited because the MCDF infirmary is only open 8:30 - 4:30 Monday - Friday, and lacks a pharmacy.

The SO cannot currently increase occupancy at MCDF due to these conditions. To prepare the property for increased occupancy, the following should be done at MCDF:

- 1. Reinforce the floors of Wings A and B.**

Wings A and B could be occupied after the aged wooden floors are reinforced.

- 2. Expand the infirmary hours and add a pharmacy.**

If the infirmary expanded its hours and provided care seven days a week, more inmates with medical conditions could be transferred to the MCDF. An on-site pharmacy would also broaden the scope of medical care.

Ways to Decrease Occupancy at the MDF

1. **SB 863 Jail Construction Funding to increase inmate capacity**
In August 2015, the SO will apply for Senate Bill 863 funding (jail construction) that would provide \$90 million to build a 240-bed mental health wing at WCDF. The County will provide a 10% match of \$9 million. If the bid is successful, the new facility will not be completed until late 2018 or early 2019.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury recommends that the SO maintain strong inmate classification oversight so that each individual has an opportunity for restorative rehabilitation. Increasing the MCDF occupancy is an opportunity to provide more inmates with the benefits of living in a natural setting.

If the SO is unsuccessful in obtaining new construction funds for a WCDF mental health wing, the Grand Jury recommends that the SO find alternative funding to relieve the crowding at the Martinez Detention Facility.

FINDINGS

- F1. The MCDF uses 1/3 of its dormitory space.
- F2. The five-year average daily occupancy rate at the MCDF is 52 inmates, although there is capacity for 160 inmates.
- F3. MCDF, built in 1942, is 73 years old.
- F4. MCDF occupies 32 acres of a 164-acre parcel owned by the County at the southeastern foot of Mt. Diablo.
- F5. The Sheriff's Office has a shooting range and a training facility on the County's 164-acre parcel at the southeastern foot of Mt. Diablo.
- F6. There are six dormitory wings at the MCDF.
- F7. The MCDF dormitory, Wings F and G, are permanently closed, Wings B and C are open; and Wings A and B are closed but could re-open if the flooring were reinforced.
- F8. Barbed wire fences surround the perimeter of the MCDF.
- F9. MCDF is a low-security prison.

- F10. MCDF lacks security cameras.
- F11. The SO does not transfer offenders who are flight risks and prone to violence to the MCDF because it lacks adequate security.
- F12. One Contra Costa County deputy sheriff is on duty at night at the MCDF.
- F13. There are minimal behavioral conflicts at the MCDF.
- F14. The infirmary at the MCDF is open 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday.
- F15. Inmates needing access to medical personnel 24-hours a day, such as those with cardiac and pulmonary issues, diabetes, asthma and severe allergies, may not be housed at the MCDF
- F16. The MCDF lacks a pharmacy.
- F17. The MCDF inmates have opportunities for rehabilitation.
- F18. The SO provides classes for personal growth, academic education and job skills to inmates at the MCDF.
- F19. Gang issues are a primary reason why Martinez Detention Facility inmates do not eat in a communal setting or take group classes.
- F20. Inmates at the Martinez Detention Facility are released to an interior room and a cement-walled courtyard for one to three hours either once a day or every other day, based on an inmate's classification.
- F21. In August 2015, there are plans to submit an application on behalf of Contra Costa County, for \$90 million of State funds made available pursuant to Senate Bill 863. The funds will be used to build a 240-bed mental health wing at the WCDF.
- F22. If the State awards Contra Costa County with Senate Bill 863 funds, the SO estimates that construction of the 240-bed mental health wing at the WCDF will be completed by late 2018 or early 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The SO should consider ways to fund the restoration of MCDF Wings A and B.
- R2. The SO should consider providing medical staffing 24-hours a day, seven days a week and a pharmacy at the MCDF, and ways to fund such staffing and the pharmacy.

- R3. Once Recommendations 1 - 2 have been accomplished, the SO should consider broadening the classification of MCDF inmates so that the facility will be fully utilized.
- R4. If the State does not award SB 863 jail construction funds to the County, the SO should consider alternative plans and associated funding methods to reduce inmate occupancy at the Martinez Detention Facility.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

	<u>Findings</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office	Findings 1-22	(Recommendations 1-4]

Appendix A

TGF Foundation Naturesacred.org *UNDERSTANDING STRESS*

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