

AVENAL STATE PRISON

SYNOPSIS

On September 28, 2010, the Grand Jury toured the Avenal State Prison (ASP). The primary mission of ASP is to provide control, care, and treatment of inmates committed to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation by the courts. ASP is designated as a low to medium security institution providing cubicle housing (open dorm) and programming needs for approximately 6,300 general population inmates.

WHY THE GRAND JURY INVESTIGATED

The Grand Jury is required to visit/tour county jails and State prisons in the county.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code 919(b): The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of public prisons in the county.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury interviewed administrative staff, correctional officer dog handlers of the K-9 unit, building 310 correctional officer, medical staff, and Prison Industries Authority Supervisors from the furniture factory.

BACKGROUND AND FACTS

The Grand Jury was greeted by the staff of ASP just inside the entrance of the administrative building. The Grand Jury had made prior contact with ASP and arranged for the tour of the prison. After a brief introduction, the Grand Jury was invited to the Warden's Conference Room where all the prison's executive staff was assembled. All the department heads were introduced and gave a brief overview of the areas in the prison they represented.

The Grand Jury was then escorted to the Facility III visiting area by staff. There, the correctional officer dog handlers of the K-9 Unit were waiting with two Belgian Shepherds.

The two Belgian Shepherds assigned to ASP live in the homes of their handlers. One dog is trained for narcotic discovery and the other is trained in finding cell phones smuggled into the institution. An impressive demonstration of the dogs' searching abilities was conducted for the Grand Jury. As of September, more than 900 illegal cell phones have been discovered in 2010.

The Associate Warden (AW) then escorted the Grand Jury to Building 310, an open cubicle housing unit. There were fifteen bunk beds in each cubicle and about

twenty cubicles in the building divided between two floors. Approximately ten additional bunk beds were positioned outside the cubicle on the lower floor due to overcrowding. There was a minimal amount of inmates present in the housing unit who were medically excused from their work assignments.

Following the tour of Building 310 the Grand Jury was escorted to the ASP medical facility which was recently constructed. The medical staff met with the Grand Jury and explained the functions of this treatment facility. All inmates were registered and processed through a security check by correctional staff upon entering or exiting the area. There was a large waiting room with benches where the inmates were triaged for the level of medical seriousness prior to being seen.

There, the inmates have access to medical doctors and psychiatric care. The treatment area rooms and offices were in a secure area separate from the waiting room. The facility and equipment appeared to be new and in good condition. Upon leaving the ASP medical facility, the Grand Jury boarded a bus. The AW directed the driver to tour the inner perimeter road. He pointed out the conjugal visiting area where inmates can stay overnight with their families

The Grand Jury also noticed and asked about what appeared to be a grave-yard for golf carts. The AW said, due to the economy and budget cuts the carts had fallen into disrepair and were being stripped for parts to keep some carts operational. He said the bicycle repair and landscaping training programs were also cut or scrapped due to the economy.

The quality of the furniture manufactured in the prison impressed everyone who saw it. The furniture cannot be sold to the public. All of the furniture produced by the Prison Industries Authority is sold to California government funded schools and agencies.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

None

COMMENTS

None

RESPONSE REQUIREMENT

None