



October 28, 2020

The Honorable Judge J.S. Hermanson
Superior Court of California
County of Amador
500 Argonaut Lane
Jackson, CA 95642

RE: 2019-2020 Grand Jury Response

Dear Judge Hermanson,

The following is the official response to the below listed report in the requested format.

Title of Report: Amador County Jail

Responding Agency: Amador County Sheriff's Office

Response by: Sheriff Martin Ryan

GRAND JURY FINDINGS:

Finding #1 –

The Jail is 36 years old and was designed with a 20-year lifespan intended to house 76 inmates. Periodic updates and improvements have not kept up with the jail's increasing average daily population of 89 inmates.

Response to Finding #1 –

The Sheriff partially disagrees with the finding. While the age and limited size of the current jail has created problems with inmate classification and housing, programming, and storage of necessary supplies and equipment, the Amador County Jail continues to do exceptionally well in our biennial State inspections.

The Board of State & Community Corrections (BSCC) is an independent statutory agency that promulgates regulations for adult and juvenile detention facilities, conducts regular inspections of those facilities, develops standards for the selection and training of local corrections and probation officers, and administers significant public safety-related

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grant funding. During their independent inspection of correctional facilities, BSCC representatives will document any areas in which a correctional facility is not in compliance with the provisions of Title 15 and Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations. Title 15 sets the minimum standards for local detention facilities to follow pertaining to matters including, but not limited to, training, inmate classification, medical and mental health care, nutrition, hygiene, and inmate programs and activities. Title 24 establishes minimum design and space standards for the physical buildings where inmates are held.

During the Amador County Jail's most recent BSCC inspection the only area of non-compliance was in the use of a sobering cell for housing inmates with a high risk of having a medical emergency. The sobering cell is located in a high traffic area, adjacent to the jail's control room, where officers can more frequently directly observe the inmate's welfare.

As the existing jail continues to age, and additional burdens are placed upon local correctional facilities with the long-term housing of inmates, significant consideration must be given on how best to spend funds to meet our county's future correctional obligations.

Finding #2 –

The Jail is overcrowded and houses both male and female adults.

Response to Finding #2 –

The Sheriff agrees with the finding. The Amador County Jail's rated capacity of 76 is based upon all inmates sharing a cell. Due to classification and safety concerns, along with the prevalence of significant behavioral health issues in our modern inmate population, many inmates cannot safely cohabitate. This effectively reduces the number of inmates the jail can appropriately house below our actual rated capacity.

Finding #3 –

Four correctional staff positions are unfilled despite recruitment efforts to fill them.

Response to Finding #3 –

The Sheriff agrees with this finding. The Amador County Jail continues to hold ongoing testing to fill vacancies for correctional officer positions. The pre-employment process consists of a BSCC designed written examination, oral interview, thorough background investigation, health screening, and psychological test. While the Amador County Jail needs to fill critical vacancies, we will not compromise our standards by hiring unqualified individuals to fill these positions of trust and responsibility.

Finding #4 –

Use of the sobering cell is non-compliant with BSCC regulations, but alternatives are unavailable until the expansion project can be completed.

Response to Finding #4 –

The Sheriff agrees with this finding.

Finding #5 –

Jail staff are professional and competent in their duties and responsibilities.

Response to Finding #5 –

The Sheriff agrees with this finding and thanks the members of the Grand Jury for recognizing the work being done by the correctional staff.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation #1 –

Paint, repair, and/or clean the issues identified (ceiling water stains in dayroom, smell of mold, dirty or moldy air vents).

Response to Recommendation #1 –

This recommendation has been implemented. With the recent jail population decrease brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic the Amador County Jail was able to move inmates so the entire interior of the facility could be repainted.

Amador County Facilities & Project Management (Facilities) is responsible for the care and upkeep of buildings operated by the County of Amador. Facilities staff members are frequently at the Amador County Jail to perform repairs, conduct maintenance work, and discuss short and long term building care projects. The Sheriff's Office has already relayed to Facilities that the jail is in need of ceiling tile replacement and air duct cleaning/replacement. The Sheriff's Office will continue to coordinate with Facilities to have this work completed.

Using funds made available by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Amador County Sheriff's Office was able to purchase numerous commercial grade air sanitation systems to be placed in the jail's housing units and common areas. These units are rated to neutralize allergens, bacteria, viruses, mold, and

other airborne contaminants making the air safer to breathe while reducing or eliminating odors. Additional, CARES funding has allowed for the purchase of a specialized inmate property vacuum sealing system. This unit allows for inmate personal property to be sealed in airtight packaging reducing the risk of exposure to contaminants and pathogens and eliminating foul odors.

Recommendation #2 –

Fill the vacant positions as soon as possible.

Response to recommendation #2 –

Efforts to implement this recommendation have been ongoing and will continue until vacancies are filled. Given the number of people employed at the Amador County Jail, fluctuations in staff numbers are not uncommon. The Amador County Sheriff's Office accepts applications for employment on an ongoing basis. Candidates seeking a Correctional Officer position must successfully complete a State approved written examination, oral board interview, background investigation, medical evaluation, and psychological screening before a full offer of employment is given. Amador County's geographic location and small population limit the number of viable candidates interested in employment as a Correctional Officer. This limited pool of applicants is then further reduced during each step of the employment process. The Amador County Sheriff's Office refuses to compromise our standards by hiring unqualified or unethical individuals to fill critical positions of public trust. The Amador County Sheriff's Office will continue to advertise and recruit to fill vacancies, with only those people with impeccable character being offered employment. Given our strict hiring standards and length of the required background and hiring process, it is impossible to project when all vacant positions will be filled.

Recommendation #3 –

With Board of Supervisor approval, the search for an appropriate location for a new county jail facility should begin in earnest along with securing funding for construction.

Response to recommendation #3 –

This recommendation will not be implemented. Plans and funding currently exist to build a 40 bed expansion adjacent to the existing jail. In addition to the 40 inmate beds, this expansion will provide two additional recreation yards, storage space for jail equipment and supplies, two program/class rooms, a respiratory isolation cell, and enhanced medical and dental exam rooms for our inmate population.

The Sheriff and Board of Supervisors have been addressing the need for jail expansion or replacement since 2009 when Assembly Bill 900 provided counties with funding for jail

replacement. Amador County received a conditional award from the State of California for \$22,712,000, however the increasing costs associated with replacing the entire jail made it impossible to proceed and the conditional award was returned.

With the emergence of Senate Bill 863, state grant monies were again made available for a much less expensive expansion project. Amador County submitted an application in the small county category for our new 40 bed jail expansion project and received a conditional award of \$17,179,000. This award, unlike the previous AB 900 award that was returned due to matching cost requirements, means the county General Fund will be far less impacted due to construction costs. In July of 2016, the SB 863 funds were officially established and Amador County has completed architectural design of the new jail expansion facility. Due to pending litigation efforts, construction of the expansion has been delayed. Once the litigation efforts are successfully resolved, which is anticipated, construction efforts can move forward on this much needed jail expansion project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Ryan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARTIN A. RYAN
Sheriff-Coroner

CC: Patrick Crew, Chairman, Amador County Board of Supervisors
Chuck Iley, Amador County CAO