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FRESNO COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
By _____ DEPUTY

**2009-2010
FRESNO COUNTY GRAND JURY**



**FINAL REPORT
#1**

Fresno County
2009 – 2010 Grand Jury
Report # 1

Claremont Custody Center
Coalinga, CA

INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the Governor of California signed into law Senate Bill 1591, designed to relieve overcrowding conditions in the state prisons. The law provided for the State Department of Corrections to negotiate long-term contracts with local governments to build and operate minimum-security facilities for the custody of parole violators (Level I & II inmates). The city of Coalinga was the first of five California cities to participate in the State program. Claremont Custody Center (CCC) is owned and operated by the city of Coalinga, CA. They are contracted by the State of California to house state inmates. They operate following California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation guidelines and Pleasant Valley State Prison is their hub facility.

This year the grand jury examined the operation and condition of CCC in Coalinga, CA on September 17, 2009. We were welcomed by the staff of CCC and various members of the Coalinga city government.

BACKGROUND

The CCC was built in 1990 as a Return to Custody Center (RTC) for women. Prior to opening its doors the designation was changed to Community Correctional Facility (CCF). The first prisoners arrived in February of 1991. In 1992 the State of California decided to move the females to the women's prison in Chowchilla, CA. The facility then began housing state male inmates with less than 18 months left on their sentence.

A CCF is a prison that is either owned and operated by a private contractor or city/county government and contracted by the state to house state inmates. This is done as a means for the state to save money because a contractor can house inmates for less money than what it would cost the state to house the same inmates. Currently, CCC can house and care for an inmate for an average cost of approximately \$22,600 per year. This is compared to approximately \$49,000 per year for inmates housed in the state prison system according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) Fourth Quarter 2008 Report. This represents a significant cost savings.

The facility was built on approximately ten acres of land, two miles outside the city of Coalinga. It has 514 beds in two separate housing units with an administration building between the housing units. The population currently is 350 inmates. Thus, the existing facility is under-utilized. The occupancy rate in the Coalinga facility is consistent with other private correctional centers in the state of California.

The housing units provide dormitory living with the two housing units divided into seven dormitories. One dorm is specifically utilized for housing inmates awaiting classification or inmates with disciplinary issues.

The administration building contains the administrative offices, inmate receiving and release, a centralized kitchen with two dining rooms, laundry facilities, medical clinic, inmate library, visiting room and commissary.

CCC Staff

The CCC currently employs sixty-four full-time and four part-time correctional staff members and thirteen non-correctional staff members. All are employees of the city of Coalinga and report to the Coalinga Chief of Police. The staff also includes five educators employed through West Hills Community College and the Coalinga/Huron Unified School District.

CDCR Staff

The State of California has assigned to CCC one California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation Captain, three Case Counselor I positions and one Case Counselor II.

The Captain monitors the CCC in order to insure contract compliance relating to the Penal Code, CDCR's Department Operations Manual (DOM) and Title 15 of the California Administrative Code. In addition, the Captain also supervises the Case Counselors. The Case Counselors are assigned a caseload of inmates for which specific duties must be accomplished.

Medical:

Inmates that are housed at CCC must meet a minimum medical and dental requirement. This is due in part, to the fact that they do not have a full-time medical staff. However, there is a nurse's station that has a nurse (LVN) on duty daily and a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) that comes every Thursday. Any acute medical problems are sent to Pleasant Valley State Prison (PVSP) medical service.

Inmates:

Inmates, once classified, are assigned to either a work program or educational opportunities.

Inmate Work Assignments:

Inmates assigned to work provide the following services:

- Cooks
- Clerks
- Culinary Laborers
- Barbers
- Laundry Services
- Porters
- Maintenance Recreation Coordinators
- Outside Landscaping Crews

Educational Opportunities:

The CCC provides educational opportunities to inmates. The CCC partners with the Coalinga-Huron Unified School District, West Hills Community College District and the Tulare Adult School to facilitate and provide a quality education.

By working with the Coalinga-Huron Unified School District and West Hills Community College District, the CCC establishes an educational curriculum designed to provide inmates the opportunity to develop personal, educational, vocational, social, and behavioral skills necessary for achieving a more normal lifestyle.

Full-time education courses provided by the Coalinga-Huron Unified School District include, but are not limited to, General Education Development (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

Short-term academic and vocational education courses currently provided by the West Hills Community College District are available to inmates as well.

Additional academic and vocational training courses include, heavy equipment operation and computer skills. Other courses are currently under consideration for addition to the curriculum.

The Pre-Release program provides the opportunity for inmates to enhance the life skills necessary for release and return to public life. This program is a process designed to bridge the gap from dependent facility living to experiencing successful, self-directed community adjustment. The Pre-Release program is designed to be available to inmates regardless of their eligibility for work furlough or discharge.

Currently, the Pre-Release program is a joint venture between the CCC and West Hills Community College District. This course is considered a credit/no credit course, so units are not included in calculation of the individual grade point average (GPA). Inmates successfully completing the course will receive credit for completion as well as a certificate of completion from West Hills Community College.

Animal Shelter:

The city of Coalinga and CCC entered into a joint venture to build and operate a state of the art animal shelter utilizing inmate labor. The animal shelter was built on CCC prison property. This saved the city 1.1 million dollars in construction costs. In addition, the animal shelter is maintained and animal care is provided by inmate labor, which gives an ongoing cost savings to the city.

Service Center:

The city of Coalinga redirected the city Vehicle Fleet Service Center to the CCC, which allowed the city to operate with one less mechanic. The two remaining city mechanics supervise an eleven-member inmate crew as follows:

- 8 mechanics
- 1 clerk to facilitate paperwork
- 1 tool room clerk
- 1 porter

ISSUE OF CONCERN

There is concern regarding the existing contract with the State of California and the overall budgetary situation. The CCC may be forced to reduce their inmate population because of the prisoner release program currently under consideration by the Governor and state legislature. The existing twenty-year contract with the State expires in 2010 and the construction of CCC was financed with a thirty-year bond. If the prison population diminishes there will be a negative financial impact to the city of Coalinga.

CONCLUSION

The grand jury feels the State of California under-utilizes the private prison system for level I & II inmates. The private detention facilities in Coalinga, Delano, Adelanto, Shafter, Taft and Susanville have a budgeted capacity of 2,961 beds. The population on September 14, 2009 was 1,930 inmates, which represented an occupancy rate of only 65.2%. Because of this high vacancy rate and since the cost for housing inmates is less than those in the State prison system; we feel the CDCR should consider transferring selected level I & II inmates from overcrowded prisons to CCC and other private prisons within California.

FINDINGS

- F201 The vocational education programs in the private prison system prepares the inmates for release into civilian life.
- F202 Educational opportunities at CCC are comparable to those offered through the CDCR system.
- F203 The private correctional centers established in California are under-utilized.
- F204 CCC utilized inmate labor to create a community animal shelter that has generated a cost savings to the city of Coalinga for initial construction and ongoing maintenance and animal care.
- F205 CCC can house and care for inmates at a substantial savings compared to the state prison system.
- F206 The Vehicle Fleet Service Center at CCC provides the city of Coalinga with cost effective vehicle maintenance and provides job-training opportunities for inmates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2009-2010 Fresno County Grand Jury recommends the following be implemented:

- R201 The CDCR should initiate a study to determine if it is economically feasible and logistically practical to send more Level I & II inmates to CCC and private correctional centers in accordance with Senate Bill 1591.
(F203, F205)

REQUEST FOR RESPONDANTS

Pursuant to Penal Code 933.05, the Fresno County Grand Jury requests responses to each of the specific findings and recommendations. It is required that responses from elected officials are due within 60 days of the receipt of this report and 90 days for others.

RESPONDANTS

- Bill Skinner, City Manager – Coalinga, CA (F201 - F206, R201)
- Matthew Cate, Secretary of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (F201 - F206, R201)

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Interviews with CCC staff
- Claremont Custody Center web site
- California Penal Code
- CDCR Fourth Quarter 2008 Report
- Senate Bill 1591