

Merced County Civil Grand Jury Report



2024-2025

Acknowledgements

The Old Adobe of Rancho San Luis Gonzaga: (top picture)

San Luis Gonzaga was the first spot in Merced County to be given a non-indigenous name. In the early 1800s it was a destination, a campground, known by every Spanish horseman visiting the Valley. In 1844 Don Juan Pacheco built an adobe fortress at the campground. He had been given a 48,000-acre ranch by the Mexican government as an inducement to live in the San Joaquin Valley and the adobe was located at the base of the pass. Don Juan died early and his father, Francisco Pacheco, inherited his son's property. Since Francisco Pacheco already owned the western portion of the pass, he ended up owning the entire pass, now known as Pacheco Pass. The Pacheco family persevered through the transition of governance of this region from Mexico to the United States and were able to maintain their land ownership. In 1963 an attempt was made to move the adobe from the footprint of the construction of San Luis Reservoir to a site west on top of Pacheco Pass but unfortunately the adobe collapsed in route. The remains can still be found at Pacheco State Park on land that was donated to the State by Paula Fatjo, a direct descendent of Francisco Pacheco.

Merced County High School House: (bottom picture)

During the 2024-2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury term, the oldest historical building in the County and City of Merced was destroyed in a fire. This important landmark was a major loss for the community. Built in 1897 as a high school, the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984 and recognized for its historical and architectural significance. The Merced County School House Building, located at 2125 M Street in the City of Merced, was burned down on December 3, 2024.

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Map of Merced County





CIVIL GRAND JURY
PO BOX 2692
MERCED, CA 95344
<http://www.co.merced.ca.us/grandjury>

June 30, 2025

The Honorable Stephanie Jamieson

Presiding Judge of the Civil Grand Jury

Merced County Superior Court

Dear Judge Jamieson:

The 2024-2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) jurors are honored to have served on the Grand Jury. After careful review, we proudly present this final report to the Merced County Superior Court and to the citizens of Merced County in accordance with the California Penal Code, Section 933.

The Grand Jury started its term in July 2024 and concluded on June 30, 2025. Several training courses were provided by the Civil Grand Jurors' Association to the jurors including Civil Grand Jury Training Seminars and Foreperson and Pro Tempore Workshop. Despite the training, the Grand Jury had a slow start as all the jurors were new, except for one. The jurors had a lot to learn about Merced County and their work as jurors. The term ended strong with 19 very engaged jurors.

As mandated by law, the Grand Jury inspected several county detention facilities: Merced County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Main Jail facility, the John Latorraca Correction Center, and the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex. These facilities were visited by several teams of jurors and procedures were followed as outlined in the Merced County Civil Grand Jury Procedures manual.

During 2024-2025 term, the Grand Jury received 44 new and 5 carry-over citizens' complaints. Each complainant received correspondence from the Grand Jury regarding the status of their complaint(s) through mail and/or email. The jurors were committed to understanding the concerns of the complainants and treated each grievance with their full attention and respect as they worked through various committees including:

- Law and Justice Committee
- Health, Education and Welfare Committee
- Administration and Finance Committee

- Environmental and Transportation Committee

Many of the complaints were found to be out of the Grand Jury's jurisdiction and there were no investigative findings.

The jurors have expressed their sincere appreciation for the opportunity to serve and function as an arm of the court and to be the voice of the people.

I want to thank my fellow jurors for their hard work and collaborative spirit. We are a diverse group of dedicated people with a wide range of skills and abilities. I thank jurors who shared their time, knowledge, and resources during the entire Grand Jury term.

Most importantly, we (the jurors and I) want to express our sincere appreciation for the assistance and support of the Superior Court Administration Staff, the Information and Technology staff, the Auditor's office, and the County Council's office. It has been a privilege to serve as the foreperson of the Merced County Grand Jury during the 2024-2025 term.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Mickey J. Williams,
Foreperson, 2024-2025

ABOUT THE CIVIL GRAND JURY 2024-2025

(Listed in Alphabetical Order)

1. Beck, Estée*
2. Camper, Scott
3. Cearley, Ronald
4. Dickinson, Melissa
5. Ferrario, Sebastian*
6. Franklin, Margaret – Pro-Tem
7. Grinder, Shelby
8. Hartley, Tammy
9. Hicks, Gregory
10. Hunton, Linda
11. Lovato, Cynthia*
12. Martinez, Carl*
13. McNece, Tammy
14. Mercer, Gena
15. Ouse, Greg
16. Piro, Robyn – Recording Secretary
17. Roberts, Aaron
18. Sechrist, Gregory
19. Sigmond, Candace
20. Steeves, Patrick*
21. Tolsma, Andrew
22. Urquizo, Susana
23. Williams, Mickey – Foreperson
24. Williams, Steven

*Members unable to complete their term

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury members resided in the following communities in Merced County:

Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Hilmar, LeGrand, Los Banos, Merced

MANDATED INSPECTIONS

The 2024-2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ), in accordance with the requirements of California Penal Code Section 919(b), conducted inspections of the following detention facilities in Merced County.

- Iris Garrett Juvenile Correctional Complex
- John Latorraca Correctional Center
- Merced County Sheriff's Department Main Jail

The purpose of these inspections was to “inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the county,” as stated in the Code. Members of the MCCGJ visited, toured, inspected, and interviewed staff and several inmates. The results are included in this report

The following departments were not inspected because, according to California Penal Code section 925, inspection is not mandated when arrestees are transferred directly to the Merced County Main Jail.

- Atwater Police Department
- California Highway Patrol
- Dos Palos Police Department
- Fish and Game Department
- Gustine Police Department
- Livingston Police Department
- Los Banos Police Department
- Merced Police Department



Mandated Inspections of Detention Facilities

In accordance with the requirements of the California Penal Code (CPC) Section 919(b), the 2024-2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ) conducted inspections of the jail facilities within Merced County. According to CPC Section 919(b), these inspections are required in order to inquire into the management and condition of the jails within the county. Under these provisions, several members of the MCCGJ toured and inspected the following facilities:

- Iris Garrett Juvenile Correctional Complex
- John Latorraca Correctional Center
- Merced County Sheriff's Department Mail Jail

The following Police Departments and Jail facilities are exempt from the above list based on the discontinuation by the cities of using their holding facility. Detainees from Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos, and Merced, along with the California Highway Patrol, and California Fish and Game are transported to the Merced County Main Jail. (Per California Penal Code 925, inspections are not mandated of these facilities.)

Merced County Civil Grand Jury

Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex

SUMMARY

On December 10, 2024, the 2024–2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury conducted an inspection of the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex (IGJJC), located at 2840 W. Sandy Mush Road in Merced County. The IGJJC is a secure detention and youth treatment facility operated by the Merced County Probation Department. In addition to youth housing, the facility includes a complete juvenile court system, comprised of a courtroom, a clerk’s office, and conference rooms for attorneys to meet with their clients. Youth detained at IGJJC receive mental health and medical care on-site, while dental services are accessed through outside providers.

Facility staff demonstrate exceptional dedication to ensuring that detained youth have access to the best possible correctional and rehabilitative opportunities. Their efforts are focused not only on supporting youth during detention but also on developing comprehensive rehabilitation plans aimed at helping them successfully transition back into the community upon release.

GLOSSARY

IGJJC – Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex

BSCC – Board of State and Community Corrections

Grand Jury – Merced County Civil Grand Jury

APEX - A curriculum provided by the Merced County Office of Education.

IEP/504 - Individual Educational Programs for learners with special needs.

BACKGROUND

Several representatives presented the inspection presentation for the Grand Jury. This included the Merced County Probation Department, a Probation Division Manager, a Deputy Program Specialist, a representative from GEO Reentry Services, and a representative from the Merced County Office of Education.

Upon intake, IGJJC staff categorize each youth according to their criminal offenses. A variety of assessments and screenings are also conducted, including evaluations for medical and mental health status, community risk factors, suicidal tendencies, trauma, and potential sexual victimization behaviors. These intake procedures are consistent with facility policy and exceed regulatory standards.

Due to ongoing construction at the site, Grand Jury members experienced some difficulty in locating the IGJJC building.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Grand Jury met with representatives from the Merced County Probation Department, the Merced County Office of Education, and associated service contractors. All questions presented by Grand Jury members were answered satisfactorily. The Grand Jury toured the intake area, medical facilities, outdoor spaces, common areas, monitoring areas, cells, classrooms, and an incentive room. Additionally, the Grand Jury reviewed inspection reports from the Board of State and Community Corrections.

DISCUSSION

The Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex has the capacity to house up to 90 youths but typically averages between 35 and 40. At the time of the inspection, the facility housed 38 youth ranging from ages 13 to 19. Youth residents participate in several programs focused on education, skill development, and mental health support. Facility staff also organize activity nights once a month and offer a monthly "Parent Café" event to help maintain family connections.

Upon release, youth are provided with a detailed after-care plan that spans approximately three to six months and involves multiple court hearings. Each youth receives an "exit binder" containing essential documents and resources, including a birth certificate, a social security card, public transportation routes, applications for public assistance, housing resources, and job applications. Youth continue to work with probation officers for one to two years following release, with services available until they reach the age of 25.

The intake area was observed to be clean and well organized. The medical facility consists of two rooms: an office and an exam room. Medical care is provided on-site 24 hours a day, while major medical, dental, and vision services are arranged through external providers. Religious services for all denominations are available weekly or upon request through outside agencies.

The Grand Jury observed a dedicated garden area that is cultivated and maintained by youth residents. The youth suggest which produce to plant, care for the crops, harvest the produce, and prepare the food in the facility's kitchen. At the time of the inspection, a greenhouse was under construction to expand gardening activities. A chicken coop was also being weatherized with the goal of housing chickens by February 2025, with eggs intended for facility use. The outdoor areas were clean and well maintained.

The outdoor exercise space is equipped with free-standing exercise equipment chosen based on suggestions from youth residents. Inspection of the common areas, cells, and monitoring spaces revealed that these areas are located in close proximity to one another. The common area, located adjacent to the sleeping quarters, features several tables used for meals and socializing. A small kitchen area is also available where youth prepare meals from the on-site garden.

Youth at IGJJC are permitted to use tablets for one hour per day to video call or text approved family members and individuals. Tablets may also be used for educational and employment-related activities. All tablet use is closely monitored, and devices can be deactivated at any time if necessary.

Educational programming is managed by the Merced County Office of Education. Services are overseen by a vice principal and two teachers. Youth complete coursework using APEX, an online educational platform with no external internet access. Classrooms were observed to be clean, well organized, and designed with flexible seating arrangements. Youth with IEPs or 504 Plans receive all prescribed services. Opportunities for higher education are also available through Merced College. Youth from IGJJC operate a coffee cart business called “Higher Grounds” within the county. Plans are underway to expand vocational training to include forklift certification, welding instruction, and other trade skills to better prepare youth for successful reintegration into the workforce.

Facility staff reported that it remains challenging to find business and industry partners willing to offer community service opportunities for released youth.

The youth living quarters consist primarily of double-occupancy cells, although some youths are housed individually. Cells were observed to be in good condition and very clean. The facility building is large and primarily composed of painted cinderblocks in a dated color scheme. A dormitory remodel is in the planning stages to modernize the sleeping quarters, improve the color scheme, and incorporate different wall textures.

Despite these challenges, facility staff are to be highly commended for their dedication to providing high-quality correctional opportunities for detained youth. Staff interactions with youth promote mutual respect, and the staff work diligently to develop and expand programs aimed at preparing youth for life after release.

During the visit, it was noted that there was a lack of clear directional signage throughout the area. There were no visible signs to guide the public to designated parking and visiting areas. Additionally, there was no signage distinguishing between the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex and the adjacent John Latarocca facility.

FINDINGS

F1: Finding community service opportunities for released youth remains challenging.

F2: There is a lack of clear signage identifying the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex, making it difficult to locate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1: It is recommended that the Merced County Probation Department continue to actively seek partnerships with businesses and industries that can offer community service opportunities. (F1)
- R2: It is recommended that clear signage identifying the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Complex be purchased and installed at or near the facility entrance to improve visibility and ease of access. (F2)

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required in 60 days pursuant to Penal Code sections 933.05:

From the following individuals:

- Merced County Board of Supervisors respond to (F2, R2)

INVITED RESPONSES

The following is invited to respond in 90 days:

- Admin Division Director – Probation Department (F1, R1) and (F2, R2)

Responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Merced County Superior Court in accordance with penal code § 933.05.

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

Merced County Civil Grand Jury

Merced County Main Jail

SUMMARY

On October 18, 2024, the Merced County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted its annual inspection of the Merced County Sheriff's Main Jail (Main Jail) located at 700 W. 22nd Street, Merced, as required under California Penal Code Section 919(b).

The Main Jail, constructed in 1968, is in disrepair and requires substantial improvements to maintain compliance with state standards. Construction of a new facility began in 2022 and is scheduled for completion in 2026.

The Sheriff's Department continues to face challenges retaining staff after initial training.

GLOSSARY

Jail Type Facilities as defined by the BSCC:

Type I holds inmates up to 96 hours.

Type II holds inmates pending arraignment, during trial, and after sentencing.

Type III holds only convicted or sentenced inmates.

BSCC – Board of State and Community Corrections

Grand Jury – Merced County Civil Grand Jury

The Main Jail – Merced County Sheriff's Main Jail

BACKGROUND

The Main Jail is operated by the Merced County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation as a Type II facility, housing both low and high-risk inmates. The facility has a capacity of 189 inmates; at the time of inspection, 177 inmates were housed there.

The inspection included a review of all mandated reports, including Fire, Medical/Health, Environmental Health, and Nutrition Health.

Capacity, security, and facility concerns at the Main Jail are being addressed through the John Latorraca Correctional Center Expansion Project, which is intended to bring the County into compliance with California's Title 15 and Title 24 minimum standards for local detention facilities.



PHOTO CREDIT – COUNTY OF MERCED WEBSITE

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed the inspection report from the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), dated May 1, 2024, following their March 19, 2024 inspection.

Additionally, Grand Jury members met with Sheriff's Department personnel and attended a 40-minute presentation addressing facility conditions, staffing challenges, and inmate statistics. All questions posed by the Grand Jury were answered satisfactorily. The inspection also involved a physical tour of the Main Jail and discussions with both staff and management.

DISCUSSION

Built in 1968, the Main Jail suffers from significant wear and tear. Although office areas appeared to be reasonably maintained, the Grand Jury observed numerous issues, including peeling paint and damaged ceiling tiles. A major concern identified was the insufficient staffing levels at the facility. This shortage is also reflected in the BSCC Adult Noncompliance Status Report. This creates potential safety and security risks within the facility.

During the inspection, it was noted that a single officer was managing responsibilities typically assigned to a two-person post. This included monitoring multiple security cameras, managing facility access, and answering incoming calls from the control room. Inmates are housed in a linear corridor layout that necessitates regular physical walkthroughs by officers, supplemented by video surveillance. Housing assignments are determined based on criminal classification and security risk.

Statistical data presented by the Sheriff's Department revealed that during 2024, of 5,079 inmates held within the Merced County Correctional Facilities, 253 were non-U.S. citizens and 3,393 were of unknown citizenship. Additionally, 93% of the inmate population had a maximum-security classification.

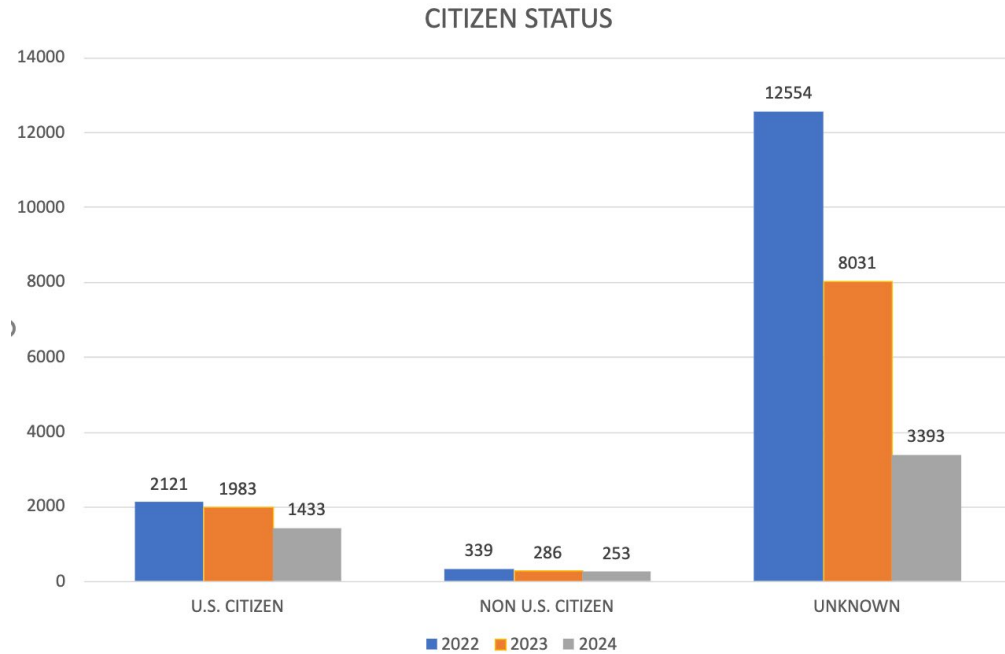


Photo Credit - Merced County Sheriff Grand Jury Report 2024

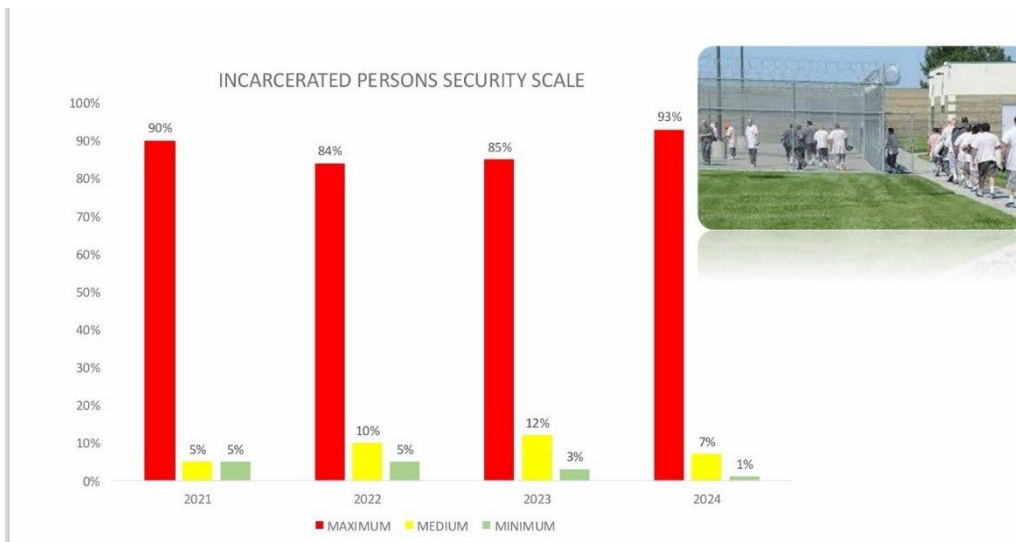


Photo Credit - Merced County Sheriff's Grand Jury Report 2024

To help reduce the inmate population, the Sheriff's Department collaborates with Merced County Probation and community partners such as Geo Reentry Services, ACE Overcomers, and The Phoenix Project. These partnerships provide post-release supervision, mental health counseling, transitional housing, and employment assistance programs.

FINDINGS

F1: The Main Jail continues to be out of compliance with California Title 15, Section 1027, concerning staffing levels, recruitment, training, and retention.

F2: There is a staff shortage at the Merced County Sheriff's Department.

F3: A general lack of maintenance exists at the facility that may put staff and inmates at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: It is recommended that Merced County create and conduct a survey focused on employee engagement and staff retention. (F1, F2)

R2: It is recommended that the Facilities and Maintenance Department of the Merced County Sheriff Department review and update the preventative maintenance plan to address facility issues. (F3)

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required in 60 days pursuant to Penal Code sections and 933.05.

- Merced County Board of Supervisors respond to (F1), (F2, R1), and (F3, R2)

The following responses are required in 90 days pursuant to Penal Code sections and 933.05.

- Merced County Sheriff (F1), (F2, R1) and (F3, R2)
- Merced County CEO (F1), (F2, R1) and (F3, R2)

Responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Merced County Superior Court in accordance with Penal Code § 933.05.

DISCLAIMER

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Merced County Civil Grand Jury

John Latorraca Correctional Center

SUMMARY

On October 25, 2024, the 2024–2025 Merced County Civil Grand Jury conducted an inspection of the John Latorraca Correctional Center (JLCC), located at 2840 W. Sandy Mush Road in Merced County. This inspection was part of the Grand Jury’s annual review as mandated by California Penal Code Section 919(b). A second inspection was conducted on February 25, 2025. The JLCC houses both male and female inmates in segregated housing units.

At the time of the inspections, construction was underway to expand the facility, which is expected to improve the current physical conditions. However, the Grand Jury’s primary concerns included the shortage of permanent staff and the ongoing facility maintenance issues.

GLOSSARY

JLCC – John Latorraca Correctional Center

BSCC – Board of State and Community Corrections

Jail Type Facilities as defined by the BSCC:

Type I holds inmates up to 96 hours.

Type II holds inmates pending arraignment, during trial, and after sentencing.

Type III holds only convicted or sentenced inmates.

BACKGROUND

The John Latorraca Correctional Center is classified as a Type II jail facility and is operated by the Merced County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The facility has a capacity of 564 inmates. During the October 2024 inspection, 502 inmates were housed at the JLCC.

However, two sections of the facility were closed to accommodate the ongoing expansion project, resulting in a temporary reduction in available housing. Construction on the expansion project began on January 27, 2022, with a projected completion date of February 2027. Due to construction activities, existing directional signage around the facility was observed to be lacking.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed the BSCC inspection report dated May 1, 2024, which was based on an inspection conducted on March 19, 2024. Additionally, Grand Jury members met with representatives of the Sheriff's Department and attended a 40-minute presentation by the Merced County Sheriff's Department, which addressed the facility's conditions, staffing levels, and inmate statistics. All questions posed by Grand Jury members were answered satisfactorily. The Grand Jury conducted a physical inspection of the facility, held discussions with management and staff, and interviewed five inmates during their visits.

DISCUSSION

The John Latorraca Correctional Center was constructed in 1990, and at the time of the inspections, ongoing construction was evident throughout the facility. During the February inspection the Grand Jury observed what looked like mold growth in the female dormitory, particularly around the bathroom areas, along with missing trim boards near the showers. In October, the public drinking fountain located near the facility exit was found to be non-functional.

Due to the construction, two dormitories were closed. The remaining open dormitories were clean but crowded to accommodate the displaced inmate population. Plans are in place to remodel all dormitories once construction is complete.

The Merced County Sheriff's website outlines a range of inmate programs, including 12-step programs, parenting and anger management classes, life skills development, job placement services, GED programs, and Celebrate Recovery. The Sheriff's Department partners with the Merced County Probation Department to reduce the jail population through supervised release programs. Community organizations such as GEO Re-entry Services, ACE Overcomers, and the Phoenix Project, in collaboration with the Merced County Office of Education, provide behavioral and mental health counseling, transitional housing assistance, and employment services. Under consideration are plans include the construction of an on-site animal care facility where inmates will work with county animal control shelters.

Staffing shortages remain a major concern at the facility. The shortage of deputies has been an ongoing issue, as documented in the BSCC Adult Noncompliance Status Report, dated February 14, 2004. Staff shortages pose a safety risk due to insufficient staffing levels and leads to overtime requirements. During the February 2025 inspection, deputies reported a slight reduction in overtime hours as new deputies were in training.

The kitchen facility at JLCC is responsible for preparing approximately 1,500 meals daily for inmates and youths housed at the Main Jail, JLCC, and Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Center. A new kitchen is currently under construction as part of the expansion project. During an

Environmental Health and Food Inspection conducted on March 27, 2024, the facility received a satisfactory rating. However, one major health violation was identified; the documentation for food stored in insulated containers lacked timestamps. This issue was corrected the following day, on March 28, 2024.

Visitor guidelines are clearly posted on the Merced County Sheriff's website, at the visitor entrance, and in inmate common areas. Visits are scheduled based on housing units and most are limited to 30 minutes. Resources are available for visitors who may require assistance navigating the visitation process. However, issues with the phone service in the visiting area persist due to aging infrastructure, resulting in frequent static on the lines. The Sheriff's Department is exploring the use of tablets for video visitation and inmate mail services to address this problem.

During the inspection, five inmates were interviewed. Overall, inmates reported respectful treatment by staff, adequate medical care, and access to basic programs such as behavior management. However, several concerns were consistently raised, including what appeared to be water damage in bathrooms and ceilings, deteriorating shower conditions, and persistent maintenance issues that the facility-provided cleaning supplies are not addressing. Commissary prices were widely viewed as high, though hygiene kits were available. Phone service and visitation were accessible but had limitations—such as short visit durations and poor phone conditions. Some inmates expressed interest in additional programming, including vocational training and mental health support. Dorm cleanliness was noted, with inmates generally responsible for upkeep using supplies provided by staff.

During the visit, it was noted that there was a lack of clear directional signage throughout the area. There were no visible signs to guide the public to designated parking and visiting areas. Additionally, there was no signage distinguishing between the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex and the adjacent John Latarocca facility.

FINDINGS

- F1: The JLCC continues to be out of compliance with California Title 15, Section 1027, regarding the number of personnel, recruitment, training, and retention of adequate staff.
- F2: There is a staff shortage at the Merced County Sheriff's Department.
- F3: A general lack of maintenance at the facility places both staff and inmates at risk.
- F4: Existing directional signage is difficult to decipher and should be updated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1: It is recommended that Merced County create and conduct a survey focused on employee engagement and staff retention. (F1, F2)
- R2: It is recommended that the Facilities and Maintenance Department of the Merced County Sheriff's Department conduct a comprehensive review of its preventative maintenance plan. (F3)
- R3: It is recommended that the Sheriff's Department improve directional signage to enhance clarity for visitors and staff. (F4)

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required in 60 days pursuant to Penal Code sections 933.05.

- Merced County Board of Supervisors respond to (F1), (F2, R1), (F3, R2), and (F4, R3)

The following responses are required in 90 days pursuant to Penal Code sections 933.05.

- Merced County Sheriff (F1), (F2, R1), (F3, R2), and (F4, R3)
- Merced County CEO (F1), (F2, R1), (F3, R2), and (F4, R3)

Responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Merced County Superior Court in accordance with penal code § 933.05.

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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Merced County Civil Grand Jury

2024 – 2025

Compliance and Continuity Report

SUMMARY

Civil Grand Juries are seated from year to year as mandated by the California Constitution and statutes to act as a civil watchdog by investigating and reporting on local government activity. Governmental boards and agencies may be required or invited to respond to the findings in the report. This Compliance and Continuity report is a follow-up to the 2023-2024 Merced County Civil Grand Jury Report and outlines whether the mandated responses of the boards and elected county officials complied with the timelines and language requirements of the Penal Code.

BACKGROUND

Responses to the Civil Grand Jury Reports must adhere to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05. Each Grand Jury may generate a report based on investigations completed with evidence and facts. Findings from those facts generate recommendations that require responses. Responses must be made within a timeframe of 60 or 90 days from the date the report is published and are typically received after the issuing Civil Grand Jury's term has ended. The new Civil Grand Jury in place receives the responses. It is then incumbent upon the succeeding Civil Grand Jury to evaluate those responses for statutory compliance and completion. This responsibility is assigned to the Editorial and Continuity Committee.

Section 933.05 (b) requires that in the response to the Grand Jury report, elected officials or department heads must provide one of four possible responses to each recommendation:

1. The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of action taken.
2. The recommendation will be implemented, with a summary of the action taken.
3. Further analysis of the recommendation is required with an explanation and timeframe of up to six months, as to when a response will be completed.
4. The recommendations will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation.

- Reviewed California Penal Code §933.05 relevant to the report responses, findings, and recommendations made.
- Reviewed the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report including all responses to recommendations.
- Determined which responses had been received in a timely manner and in language required by the penal code.
- Sent a “Request for Past Due Response” letters to four cities which had not responded to the report on December 19, 2024. Sent a second follow up letter to those cities that had not yet responded on Feb 24, 2025.

FINDINGS

- F1: Responses were received within a timely manner and in language required by the penal code for all the mandatory and investigatory reports issued by the 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury, except for the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 - Where the Money Went,”
- F2: Regarding the investigation titled “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 – Where the Money Went,” responses were not received within a timely manner in language required from four cities: Atwater, Livingston, Los Banos and Merced.
- F3: After two follow-up letters, responses were received from all respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1: The Compliance and Continuity Committee should maintain open communications with the office of the presiding judge to see if responses have been received.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

There are no requests for responses in this report.