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Annual Detention Facilities and Law Enforcement Issues

What did the Ventura County Grand Jury discover during its annual detention facilities inspection? Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 919(b), the 2015-2016 Ventura County Grand Jury "inquired into the condition and management" of the detention facilities in Ventura County. The Grand Jury inspected the Pre-Trial Detention Facility (Main Jail), Todd Road Jail, the East Valley Jail, all nine police/Sheriff's holding facilities, and the two juvenile facilities.

The Grand Jury continued to follow a well-established methodology: touring facilities, asking questions of the various facilities' personnel, and documenting the process. In the course of fulfilling its mandate, the Grand Jury took note of factors that affected the law enforcement agencies over the past year.

The first key factor was the 2011 federal court order to reduce prison overcrowding. The resulting Public Safety Realignment Act (AB 109) significantly reduced the prison population. However, AB 109 did not meet its intended goal. The Ventura County Jail population initially rose due to newly convicted non-violent/non-serious/non-sex offenders being incarcerated in County jails instead of State prisons.

The second key factor was the passage of Proposition 47 (Prop 47) in 2014. This proposition retroactively changed the classification of many property and drug offenses from felonies to citable misdemeanors. Since the passage of Prop 47, the prison population was reduced to meet the Court mandated

goals; however, with the passage of time a number of unanticipated consequences have become evident.

Another factor affecting law enforcement is the Ventura County Sheriff's Office initiative to provide Crisis Intervention Team training to sworn staff and dispatchers. This 40-hour training is a well-recognized tool enabling law enforcement to de-escalate "crisis situations" that may involve a high-degree of emotion, disorientation, and/or mental illness. Seventy-four percent (74%) of sworn patrol officers and 40% of dispatchers have completed this program.

The Grand Jury found that, with few exceptions, the jails and holding facilities in the County are in good order. One notable concern was the state of the facility and funding for the Santa Paula police force. The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Santa Paula create a prioritized list of changes targeted at improving the capabilities of its police force.

The complete report may be accessed at www.ventura.org/grand-jury; click on the Annual Reports tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2015-2016."

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