



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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April 7, 2023

TO: Supervisor Janice Hahn, Chair
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Max Huntsman
Inspector General

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Max Huntsman".

SUBJECT: **REPORT BACK ON ADDRESSING EMERGENT ILLICIT
SUBSTANCES AND CONTRABAND ENTERING THE
LOS ANGELES COUNTY JUVENILE HALLS
(ITEM NO. 56A, AGENDA OF MARCH 7, 2023)**

PURPOSE OF MEMORANDUM

On March 7, 2023, the Board of Supervisors (Board) passed a motion directing the Office of Inspector General, with support from the Probation Oversight Commission (POC), to report back in writing within 30 days with details about the Office of Inspector General's in-depth and comprehensive investigation into how illicit substances, and contraband are entering the facilities, including through staff and visitors, with recommendations, if any, to address illicit substances and contraband from entering the juvenile halls.

In response to the Board's directive to conduct an investigation, the Office of Inspector General visited both juvenile hall facilities, conducted youth interviews in the presence of their attorneys, interviewed Probation Department staff, reviewed Probation Department policies and procedures, monitored the security checks of persons entering the facilities through the security entrance, watched video recordings of K-9 searches conducted, and received information from informants to help assess how contraband and illicit drugs are entering the facilities and into the hands of youth.

BARRY J. NIDORF JUVENILE HALL

Overdose Incidents

The Office of Inspector General was able to confirm that three overdose incidents occurred at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall (BJNJH) this year. Two of the three incidents involved the same youth, on two consecutive days, and one involved another youth housed in the same unit. The information regarding the overdoses is based upon a review of Probation Department documentation.

On February 27, 2023, during a visual safety check, Youth 1 was seen sleeping while sitting up in his room. When the Detention Services Officer (DSO) found Youth 1 unresponsive, the DSO declared a “code blue” and called for backup. Medical personnel determined that Youth 1 had “indigested an unknown drug” and administered Narcan. The medical staff then transported Youth 1 to a nearby hospital, where Youth 1 was examined and discharged to return to BJNJH. A search of the youth’s room was never conducted after the overdose incident. The following day, while in school, Youth 1 appeared under the influence of some illegal substance. Youth 1 was escorted to BJNJH’s medical unit and transported to the hospital again for observation.

That same evening of February 28, 2023, a second Youth housed in the same unit as Youth 1 was found unresponsive in the restroom. According to the documentation, Probation staff believed that Youth 2 ingested an unknown drug. A “code blue” was declared, Narcan was administered, and Youth 2 was transported to a local hospital. The next day, on March 1, 2023, a K-9 unit conducted a search of the unit where Youth 1 and Youth 2 were housed and recovered the following:

1. Eight Fentanyl pills from inside a youth’s room along with two other pills inside the door lock.
2. Three Fentanyl pills recovered in a lotion bottle inside a youth’s room.
3. A crushed pill inside a youth’s windowsill.
4. Two large bindles of what appeared to be Fentanyl inside the dorm.
5. A makeshift straw with white residue in a youth’s room.

During the search, a youth appeared to be under the influence but the youth was not drug tested or transferred to the medical unit for observation. A search was conducted of the youth, but nothing was recovered.

The documents reviewed by the Office of Inspector General indicate that this is the only K-9 search that was conducted in this specific unit since January 1, 2023. Other

searches have been conducted in adjacent units. It was noted that youth in different units interact at times during movement from one area to another at BJNJH, specifically during recreational periods and during school hours. This appears to be a likely method that youth are using to transfer contraband to each other.

Packages thrown over perimeter walls into BJNJH

Through its investigation, the Office of Inspector General learned that packages containing contraband are being thrown over the perimeter walls of BJNJH into the facility. According to the Probation Department's supervising staff at BJNJH, this started shortly after youths were transferred from Central Juvenile Hall (CJH) to BJNJH in March 2022.

There are three perimeter walls at BJNJH where packages are thrown over a wall onto the facility grounds. According to the Probation Department staff, they have found arrows spray painted on the outside of these walls, which they believe gives direction as to the location where the contraband should be thrown over the wall.

To combat this problem, the Probation Department is conducting perimeter checks inside the facility three times a day, once every shift, to recover any contraband found on the grounds that was thrown over the walls. However, there are no logs kept of these perimeter checks and no perimeter checks are being conducted on the outside of the facility. According to the Probation Department staff, youths find ways to distract staff in order to break the back doors of their units to collect the contraband thrown over the walls. The following are photos of the plywood on the broken doors that youths broke to retrieve contraband thrown onto facility grounds.:



The Probation staff also believe drones are used to drop contraband into the facilities, and noted in its Board report back dated March 22, 2023, that it is researching the possibility of acquiring Drone Security Technology to eliminate the risk of drones dropping contraband into CJH. If acquired, Drone Security Technology should also be used at BJNJH.

Entry into the BJNJH

All visitors and staff, other than staff who transport youth to the facility, are to enter BJNJH through the front entrance way where a security check is conducted by an outside security company.¹ Office of Inspector General staff monitored the front door screening process on several weekdays and observed people entering the facility. Family visits are permitted on the weekends but special visits, which are discussed in the next section, can be scheduled during the week. Office of Inspector General staff observed that bags were not searched during the screenings, and that electric security monitors were not consistently monitored. Even when an alert was sounded as staff or other persons walked through the metal detector, no further actions were taken by the security personnel to screen the individuals with a wand or to conduct a search.

¹ Security is currently provided by Allied Universal Security Services. The Probation Department reported that it is seeking to replace Allied Universal Security Services and use security personnel from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

According to Probation Department staff, the security company has strict instructions not to touch **any** individual entering the facility, which would include weekend family visitors if the information provided to the Office of Inspector General is accurate. Based upon this information, that means if an alert is sounded, the security company will wand search an individual and ask them to empty their pockets, but no pat down searches for weapons, drugs, or other contraband are conducted. This information has not been confirmed with the security company as efforts to contact them were unsuccessful.

A second entry to BJNJH located at the front of the building is used for transportation buses. The same security company monitors this entry. However, there are no searches of the transportation buses during the departure or arrival at BJNJH conducted.

Visits/Special Visits

Youths are allowed to receive visits by parents, guardians, or persons standing in *loco parentis*² and grandparents and visits from their children.³ In addition, youths are also allowed special visits with other family members, such as adult siblings and supportive adults, with the approval of a facility administrator or as ordered by the court.⁴ Probation Department staff have concerns that these special visits have led to contraband entering the facilities because the identity of these individuals are not being properly verified. The Superintendent at BJNJH reports that he is not sure who is approving these special visitors. The Probation Department has recently ceased allowing special visits.

Unauthorized Food Deliveries

Outside food brought into the facilities for the youth is restricted to coming from “approved sources” and be non-perishable, ready to eat, and store bought (pre-packaged) foods.⁵ The policy refers to Probation staff, church groups, educators, and mental health staff, in an apparent reference to the types of groups that might be granted approval. In addition, staff are not permitted to “prepare food at home or off-site to bring it into the facilities to be consumed by minors.”⁶ By this policy, staff is prohibited from bringing restaurant prepared foods and any food from a non-approved source, delivered by an unknown person, to youth.

² *Loco Parentis* refers to the legal responsibility in which a person puts themselves in the position of assuming and discharging the obligations of a parent.

³ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Movement, Detention Services Bureau -300, section 304, Visiting.

⁴ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Movement, Detention Services Bureau-300, section 304, Visiting.

⁵ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Food Services Policies and Procedures, Hall and Camps #012.

⁶ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Food Services Policies and Procedures, Hall and Camps #012.

Persons interviewed by Office of Inspector General staff reported that for some time, youth orchestrated fake Door Dash food deliveries to bring contraband into the facility. According to the information provided to the Office of Inspector General, youths arranged for family or friends to come to the facility disguised as Door Dash delivery drivers. The Probation Department staff, in contravention of Probation Department policies, would then accept the order at the entrance of the facility, claim it as their own, and then drop it off to the youth as a favor. According to interviewees, these prohibited foods delivered to the youth were hiding contraband, including pills wrapped inside burritos. According to Probation Department management, staff have been directed that food deliveries from services like Door Dash and Uber Eats are no longer permitted.

Contraband Storage at BJNJH

Based on the Office of Inspector General's review, all contraband recovered at BJNJH is collected and stored in a locked closet inside the Superintendent's office.⁷ All of the items are placed in paper or plastic bags inside the closet, without an official written inventory of the items. Local law enforcement is not notified, and there is no process to place the evidence in a locker or to log the evidence even though Probation staff have access to the evidence logging database system used by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. In addition, inside the closet is a safe that is reported to be used to store cash and valuables. However, when the Office of Inspector General staff requested to see the contents of the safe, the Superintendent informed them that he did not have the combination to open it.

All contraband should be securely stored after being logged for evidentiary and accountability purposes and because improperly storing drugs such as Fentanyl, may pose a health hazard. Non-secure storage also increases the risk of the drugs being stolen. Including the possibility that the drugs will end up in the hands of youth in the facility. The following are photos of the contraband closet and the contraband kept inside:

⁷ According to the Superintendent, only he and his secretary have keys to the closet used to hold contraband.



CENTRAL JUVENILE HALL

Entry into CJH

All visitors and staff, other than staff who transport youth to the facility, enter CJH through the front entrance way where a security check is conducted by the same outside security company used at BJNJH. Office of Inspector General staff monitored the front door screening process during several weekday visits and observed that although bags were processed through the electronic scanner, Probation Department staff and their bags were not searched even after the metal detectors signaled an alarm. Probation Department staff also were repeatedly observed placing containers such as water cups and thermoses on top of the scanning machine as the staff walked through the metal detectors. The staff retrieve the drinking containers after walking through the metal detectors without the containers being examined or searched by security staff.

As with BJNJH, according to Probation Department staff, the security company has strict instructions not to touch **any** individual entering the facility, which would include weekend family visitors if the information provided to the Office of Inspector General is accurate. Based upon this information, that means if an alert is sounded, the security company will wand search an individual and ask them to empty their pockets, but no pat down searches for weapons, drugs, or other contraband are conducted. This information has not been confirmed with the security company as efforts to contact them were unsuccessful.

In addition to the main entrance being monitored by the private security company, there are four other entryways to CJH:

1. A side door entrance next to the staff parking entrance. Probation Directors assigned to the facility have a key to this door which allows them to bypass the main entrance. This entrance is not monitored by security.
2. A bus transportation entrance for buses carrying youths that is also used by outside vendors working at the facility. Although youth are searched before they are transported from the facility and when they arrive at their destination, the staff and outside vendors are not searched.
3. A bus transportation entrance for buses not carrying youths. This entrance is monitored by the security company, but staff is not searched entering from this entrance.
4. An entrance for the Probation Department's Internal Services Department (ISD). This entrance is monitored by the security company from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., then by the Probation Department from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. However, no searches of staff are conducted.

Packages thrown into CJH

Based on the Office of Inspector General's review, there are four perimeter walls at CJH where it was reported to the Office of Inspector General that packages are being thrown over the walls onto facility grounds. All four locations are easily accessible to the public from the outside.

Contraband Storage at CJH

The Office of Inspector General discovered that contraband recovered by Probation Department staff is not properly documented or stored. While a Probation Department staffer at CJH claimed that contraband is discarded, the staffer later explained that by discarded they actually meant that the contraband items are kept in a tote bag inside an office, on a coat rack, with jackets hiding it. Probation Department supervising staff stated that unauthorized pills confiscated are "sometimes given to [their] K-9 unit for training." No documentation was provided as to when and how pills recovered at the facility are transferred to their K-9 unit. The following are photos of the tote bag in the office where contraband is stored:



As with the contraband at BJNJH that is confiscated, contraband recovered at CJH is not properly documented or reported to local law enforcement and the same security and safety concerns regarding the storage of contraband exist at CJH.

VIOLATIONS OF PROBATION DEPARTMENT POLICIES

While the Probation Department has policies covering visitors⁸, what food items can be brought into the facilities and by whom⁹, and procedures on how to properly handle contraband recovered at facilities, these policies are not being followed or strictly enforced.¹⁰

Visitors are not permitted to bring any items other than [2 keys on a single ring and identification](#) with them into a facility. Once visitors are verified through their identification, [they are subject to search](#). Yet, as noted in this report, visitors are not thoroughly searched to ensure that no prohibited items are brought into the juvenile halls because, as reported to the Office of Inspector General, the security company is prohibited from touching **any** individual entering the facility. Probation Department policy also **requires** that all visitors are scanned using Vapor Tracer units before any visitation and, if a metal detector buzzes, are subject to a wand search. From the observations of Office of Inspector General staff and reports from Probation Department staff, the

⁸ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Movement, Detention Services Bureau 300, section 304, Visiting. The policy regarding visitations is available on the Probation Department's public website on the [Juvenile Hall page](#).

⁹ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Food Services Policies and Procedures, Hall and Camps #012.

¹⁰ Los Angeles County Probation Department, Daily Unit Operations, Detention Services Bureau 500, section 515, Handling Contraband.

security personnel responsible for searching those entering the facilities are not wanders who have set off the metal detector. While the particular policy referenced here applies to visitors, staff and others entering the facility who set off the metal detector should be checked with the wand. Routinely failing to screen staff and other persons who have set off the metal detector risks certain types of contraband, such as weapons, being brought into the facility. The failure to properly screen employees and other persons entering on weekdays, raises the possibility of lax security on the weekends when family visits occur. As noted previously, there are reports that the identity of special visitors is not being properly verified. In addition, at BJNJH it is unclear who at the facility is approving these special visits.

As detailed in the section titled, *Unauthorized Food Deliveries*, the staff's agreement to deliver outside food to youth is in violation of Probation Department policy.¹¹ These policies need to be updated and strictly enforced.

Probation Department contraband policy includes that all confiscated contraband be kept as evidence, destroyed, or removed from circulation within the facility. Contraband is required to be placed in a sealed envelope with a Contraband Inventory Summary form completed. In the event the contraband merits criminal charges, police are to be notified and a written receipt for the evidence must be obtained from the agency. Any evidence not provided to law enforcement should be safely secured until disposal.¹² As detailed in the sections on contraband storage, there is a lack of compliance with these policies.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the information reported to Office of Inspector General staff during its investigation, contraband is likely entering the facility through the following means: (1) family and special visitors entering the facility who are not being properly identified and searched; (2) staff entering the facility who are not searched, (3) being thrown over perimeter walls, (4) delivery via drone, (5) County employees and contracted vendors who may enter the facility through non-secured entrances without being searched, and (6) unauthorized food deliveries by individuals disguised as food delivery drivers with the assistance of Probation Department staff completing the delivery to the youth.

¹¹Los Angeles County Probation Department, Food Services Policies and Procedures, Hall and Camps #012.

¹²Los Angeles County Probation Department, Daily Unit Operations, Detention Services Bureau 500, section 515, Handling Contraband.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interdiction alone is rarely an effective means of preventing drug use. Many of the youth in our care struggle with mental health and substance abuse challenges. Conditions within our juvenile custody facilities encourage drug use through the absence of sufficient programming. A large percentage of youth in the camps are supplied sleep aids because of the conditions they face. Accordingly, the Office of Inspector General does not recommend a focus on enforcement over improving the conditions which drive drug use. However, the following approaches are available to supplement improving conditions in the halls:

1. All Probation Department policies on visitation, contraband, and food should be followed, with investigations and discipline for violations.
2. All visitors and their belongings entering juvenile hall facilities should be physically searched and scanned for illegal substances using Vapor Tracer units. Visitors should be required to remove all outer clothing prior to being scanned to ensure that any contraband can be visualized. Visitors who, for religious reasons, cannot remove all outer clothing (such as scarves, burkas, or yarmulke, etc.) should be taken to a private room to be searched by a staff member of the same gender with a metal detecting wand.
3. Establish randomized staff and volunteer searches through the use of scent detection canines and/or mobile trace spectrometers to deter and detect staff and volunteer contraband smuggling. Use of physical searches and enhanced searches of staffs' personal belongings, including bags and food containers.
4. Employ electronic detection devices such as mobile trace spectrometers and body scanners to assist in detecting contraband that may be secreted in the cavity of staff and visitors to the facilities.
5. All staff and visitors should be required to utilize clear plastic bags to carry personal belongings into the facilities.
6. Special visitors should only be approved by a judge and the person's identity should be verified.

7. Create policies to assist in identifying the source of contraband entering the facilities, including conducting thorough investigations that include interviews and review of video recordings of entries into the facilities, housing units and visitation areas.
8. Probation Department staff should supervise and monitor all non-privileged telephone calls in the housing unit by youths in order to listen for plans for the delivery of contraband.
9. Restrict youth from wearing excessively sized clothing that allows easier concealment of contraband.
10. Youths' personal items should be stored in areas easily monitored and inspected by Probation Department staff such as in cubby holes or open shelves.
11. The Probation Department should follow its contraband policy and consider revisions to the policy in order to adequately safeguard seized contraband.
12. All illegal contraband recovered should be documented, reported to local law enforcement or the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, retrieved by law enforcement personnel, and booked into evidence. Illegal contraband should only be safely stored inside a juvenile hall facility pending the collection by a law enforcement agency.
13. The Probation Department should utilize closed-circuit television on the outside perimeter of the facilities to deter trespassers and contraband being thrown over the walls and consistently conduct perimeter checks to retrieve contraband. These checks should be documented to ensure regularity. If acquired, Drone Security Technology should also be used at both juvenile halls.
14. The ban on outside food, including prohibiting food deliveries, should be enforced.
15. Youth appearing to be under the influence should be closely monitored, examined by medical personnel, and later subjected to random drug tests.

16. Creation of a specialized contraband unit to investigate smuggling of contraband, including conducting interviews, review of video recordings and telephone calls made within the facilities.
17. Implement security checks and searches of units and youths conducted on the weekend following visitation.
18. Bi-annual training to Probation Department staff regarding contraband detection, the proper handling of contraband, and tactics to avoid manipulation by youths that may end up assisting the contraband being brought into the facilities.
19. Education and training of outside organizations of contraband policies.
20. Track data related to drug introduction/interdiction and overdoses to better develop evidence-based empirics supported practices relying on data, including date, time, location, search reports, Narcan deployments, mail interceptions, and means of smuggling and interdiction.
21. Drug rehabilitation treatment programs for detained youth.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at 213-974-6100.

MH:sf

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