



# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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## MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

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MAX HUNTSMAN  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

May 9, 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: **SECOND 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 45 days after the Probation Department provided its report on how it is addressing the flow of contraband and illicit substances that are entering the County's juvenile halls. The Office of Inspector General's report is to address (1) whether expanding the use of K-9 search teams and supplementing existing security with law enforcement was effective in reducing the flow of substances and contraband in the juvenile halls, (2) any misuse or misconduct on the use of K-9 search teams, (3) any discrepancies with reporting on searches, and (4) recommendations on addressing illicit substances and contraband. After consulting with the POC, the Office of Inspector General provides this report.

**A. EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPANDED CANINE SEARCHES IN  
REDUCING CONTRABAND IN JUVENILE HALLS**

On March 7, 2023, the Board instructed the Probation Department to provide how it is immediately addressing the flow of illicit substances and contraband into the juvenile halls, including the use of canine search teams. The Probation Department reported to the Board on March 22, 2023, that as of March 6, 2023, it increased searches for contraband at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall (BJNJH) and Central Juvenile Hall (CJH), conducting random searches of the living units Monday through Friday, including the use of canine searches.

The Probation Department conducts searches for contraband in the juvenile halls with the use of staff search teams, canine dogs from its Special Enforcement Operations (SEO) unit, and a contracted canine search company, Interquest Detection Canines (Interquest). The Office of Inspector General reviewed data provided by the Probation Department regarding canine searches of the juvenile halls from January 6, 2023, to April 30, 2023.<sup>1</sup> The information included the date, time, names of staff assigned to the units and involved in the searches, items discovered, and information deemed relevant by the Probation Department. A comparison was made between canine searches conducted before and after the Board's March 7, 2023, motion to determine the effectiveness of increased canine searches in reducing the flow of contraband into the juvenile facilities. Based on the Office of Inspector General's review, it appears that the expanded canine searches aided in discovering and recovering contraband in the juvenile halls.

**Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall**

From January 8, 2023, to March 7, 2023, the Probation Department conducted seven canine searches of the housing units at BJNJH, four by the SEO canine unit and three by Interquest. During this approximate two-month period, the search teams recovered contraband three times. The searches were generally conducted approximately once per week, but there was a one-month gap in searches during this time period. For the three searches during which contraband was discovered, Interquest and the Probation Department recovered 19 youth manufactured weapons, 33 vape pens, 31 vape pen cartridges, 2 marijuana cigarettes, 2 cellular phones, 13 cords/charging devices, 5 tattoo

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<sup>1</sup> The Probation Department provided two tables of the searches conducted by SEO staff and the canine unit. The two tables were for a period of January 6, 2023, to March 7, 2023, and March 19, 2023, to April 14, 2023.

devices, 123 pills resembling Fentanyl, and 3 unidentified pills.<sup>2</sup> Items of less serious concern were also recovered including excessive food, excessive clothing, excessive bedding, electronic devices, pay/owe sheets,<sup>3</sup> matches, photographs related to gang activity, and pornography.

In comparison, from March 7, 2023, to April 14, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 18 searches, resulting in the recovery of 13 youth manufactured weapons, 93 vape pens, 12 vape pen cartridges, 1 tobacco cigarette, 3 marijuana cigarettes, 2 lighters, and 48 unidentified pills. It is evident that the Probation Department significantly increased the number of searches since the Board's March 7, 2023, motion. While fewer items were recovered in the recent searches, the time frame analyzed following the Board motion is approximately one-month, whereas the time period analyzed prior to the Board's motion is a three-month time period.

### **Central Juvenile Hall**

From January 6, 2023, to March 7, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 12 canine searches at the housing units at CJH resulting in the recovery of 2 vape pens, 1 cellular phone, and 1 cellular phone charging cord.

In comparison, from March 7, 2023, to April 30, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 11 searches at CJH resulting in the recovery of 1 cell phone charging cord. Although the total number of searches in this period was fewer than the period before the Board's motion, the frequency of the searches at CJH increased, with searches sometimes occurring on subsequent days.

Based on the information provided by the Probation Department, there is not a noticeable difference in the quantity of contraband recovered before the increase in canine searches and the quantity recovered after the increase in the number of searches. However, it should be noted that the majority of canine searches at CJH are conducted by Interquest as opposed to the SEO unit. There is a noticeable difference in the quantity of contraband recovered by the SEO unit during these two periods, compared to that of Interquest. This may be attributable to better technique or expertise used by the SEO unit. The Probation Department reported to the Office of Inspector General that the SEO unit is utilized more frequently at BJNJH because of the higher

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<sup>2</sup> A "vape pen" is an electronic device shaped like a pen that is used to inhale vapor from tobacco or marijuana oil.

<sup>3</sup> Pay/owe sheets are ledgers that keep track of charges and payments for illegal activities such as the sale of illegal drugs.

security level of the youths housed at BJNJH. Additionally, the superintendent at CJH or BJNJH may request that the SEO conduct additional searches if contraband is discovered during a daily unit search. Requests by the superintendent at BJNJH may account for the greater frequency of Probation or SEO searches at BJNJH.

Overall, additional canine searches by the Probation Department aided in discovering and removing contraband from the juvenile halls. In addition to leading to the discovery of contraband, frequent canine searches may also act as a deterrent to the introduction of contraband into the halls.

Although the Probation Department increased the number of canine searches since March 6, 2023, to further assist the detection of contraband in the juvenile halls, the Probation Department recently entered into a new agreement with Interquest for an increased number of canine searches at both juvenile halls. The new agreement provides for three searches per week at CJH and four searches per week at BJNJH.<sup>4</sup> The Probation Department indicated that it would review the effectiveness of the additional searches and determine if more frequent canine searches are needed.

Tragically, a youth passed away from a suspected overdose at BJNJH today. While other efforts to ensure that youth are not using drugs in the juvenile halls must be implemented, part of the plan to address drug use should include the continued use of canine searches at the juvenile halls, including a review by the Probation Department of the successfulness of the searches to better utilize its canine search teams, with the establishment of criteria for choosing when to deploy Interquest and when to deploy an SEO team.

## **B. MISUSE OR MISCONDUCT ON THE USE OF CANINE SEARCH TEAMS**

The Probation Department is required to report to the Office of Inspector General any complaints of misuse or misconduct with the use of canine searches. The Probation Department indicated that it has not received any complaints of misuse or misconduct related to the use of canine search teams. The Office of Inspector General, has not independently received any complaints from the public of misuse or misconduct regarding the Probation Department's canine search teams. Office of Inspector General staff reviewed video recordings of some canine searches. In the recordings reviewed, the searches were not overly intrusive. The canines were not seen to act aggressively,

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<sup>4</sup> The Probation Department commenced the regularly scheduled increase in canine searches at both juvenile halls on April 23, 2023.

nor did youth appear to be frightened of the dogs during the searches. Searches by canines may be less intrusive than searches by Probation officers, who must go through youths' personal belongings, whereas a search by canines limits the searches of belongings to only those items a dog alerted upon.

**C. DISCREPANCIES WITH REPORTING OF CANINE SEARCHES**

The Board instructed the Office of Inspector General to report any discrepancies discovered regarding the Probation Department's reporting of its use of canine searches. The Office of Inspector General reviewed canine search reports of searches conducted at CJH and BJNH from January 8, 2023, to April 30, 2023. The reports detailed the units searched, the Probation Department staff conducting the searches, and the contraband recovered. The Office of Inspector General did not discover any discrepancies in the Probation Department's reporting of the canine searches.

**D. USE OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT TO SUPPLEMENT THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT'S SECURITY STAFF**

In an effort to support the Probation Department's attempt to prevent the flow of contraband into the juvenile halls, its executive staff met with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (Sheriff's Department) to discuss (1) use of its Security Officers to supplement the Probation Department's existing security staff used at the entrances of the juvenile halls,<sup>5</sup> (2) use of its staff to increase perimeter checks of the juvenile hall facilities, (3) use of its narcotics canine teams to assist Probation Department staff with contraband searches, and (4) conducting a security/contraband assessment of the juvenile halls. The Probation Department's executive staff was informed that the Sheriff's Department is currently unable to provide Security Officers due to low staffing levels and a significant number of vacancies for that position. The Sheriff's Department is unable to anticipate when vacancies will be filled or when its current staffing shortage will resolve, but discussions between the Probation Department executive staff and the Sheriff's Department will continue regarding availability of Security Officers to be employed at the juvenile halls.

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<sup>5</sup> The security at the juvenile halls is currently provided by Allied Universal Security Services. The LASD utilizes uniformed non-peace officer Security Officers at the security entrances to courthouses and other Los Angeles County facilities.

The Probation Department also requested the Sheriff's Department conduct a security assessment of the Probation Department's juvenile halls. The Sheriff's Department agreed to provide an assessment and requested the Probation Department's policies related to (1) juvenile hall security, (2) contraband, (3) employee and visitor screening, (4) facility/unit searches, and (5) personal items permitted in the juvenile halls. It also requested a list of facility entrances and a description of the screening/searches conducted at each entrance. The Probation Department is currently compiling the information for the Sheriff's Department to assist with the security assessment and in anticipation of further discussions regarding the assessment.

#### **E. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In addition to the recommendations in its [Report Back on Addressing Emergent Illicit Substances and Contraband Entering the Los Angeles County Juvenile Halls](#), the Office of Inspector General makes the following recommendations:

1. Continue discussing with the Sheriff's Department the use of its Security Officers to assist the Probation Department's existing security personnel, use of its canine units for searches, and a security assessment of the juvenile halls.
2. Assessment of the effectiveness of Interquest, its currently contracted canine search company, in comparison to the SEO's canine search unit.
3. Investigate violations of all Probation Department policies on visitation, contraband possession, and possession of excess items and impose appropriate discipline for any violations.

MH:sf

c: Karen Fletcher, Interim Chief Probation Officer  
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