



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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INSPECTOR GENERAL

September 11, 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: **FOURTH 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 Probation Department to report on its efforts to address the flow of contraband and illicit substances into the County's juvenile halls, and 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's report and every 60 days thereafter on the following: (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) further recommendations on addressing illicit substances and contraband. After consulting with the POC, the Office of Inspector General provided an initial report on March 22, 2023, a second report on May 9, 2023, a third report on July 7, 2023, and now provides this fourth report.

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

The Probation Department reported to the Board on March 22, 2023, that as of March 6, 2023, it had 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. During this latest reporting period, the Probation Department also began to conduct searches at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall (LPJH) after transferring most youths from BJNJH and all youths from CJH, to LPJH.¹

As noted in the Office of Inspector General's second report the Probation Department conducts searches for contraband in the juvenile halls using staff search teams, canine dogs from its Special Enforcement Operations (SEO) unit, and a contracted canine search company, Interquest Detection Canines (Interquest). In the Office of Inspector General's third report, the Office of Inspector General reviewed data provided by the Probation Department regarding canine searches of the juvenile halls from May 2, 2023, to June 14, 2023,² to compare canine searches conducted during that period to those conducted during March and April 2023 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 appeared that the expanded canine searches continued to aid in discovering and recovering contraband in the juvenile halls. This report compares the canine searches conducted at the juvenile halls during the months of May and June 2023 to those conducted during July and August 2023.³

Despite the increased efforts to prevent illicit substances in the juvenile halls, since the last Office of Inspector General's report back, two youths from BJNJH were hospitalized for symptoms consistent with the use of illicit drugs. Fortunately, the youths survived, and returned to the facility. These incidents show that illicit drugs are likely entering the facilities and that youth continue to use them.

¹ Youths were transferred from CJH and BJNJH on July 12-13, 2023, and July 17-18, 2023, respectively, due to the Board of State Community Corrections finding that CJH and BJNJH were unsuitable to house youths.

² Searches were conducted at CJH on May 2nd but did not start at BJNJH until May 6th.

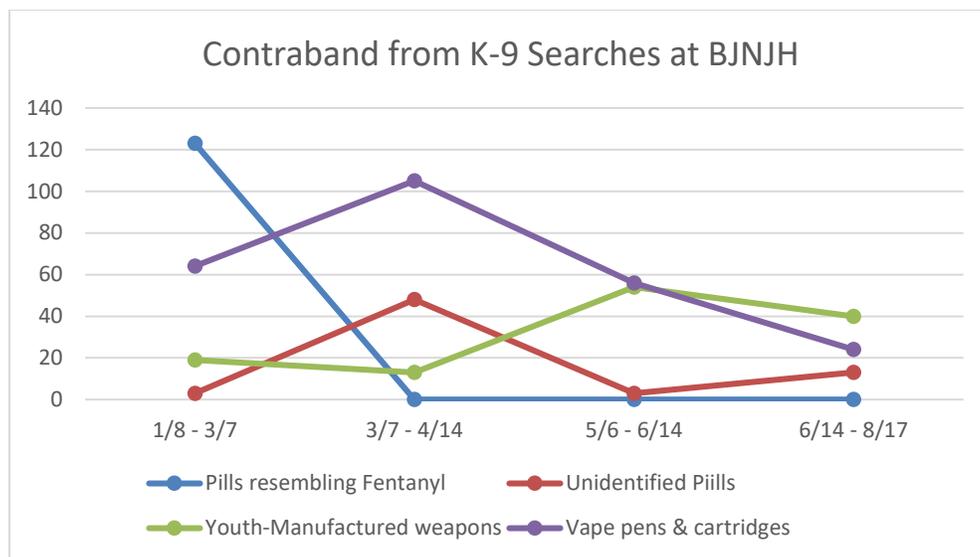
³ The review for this report was for the period May 8, 2023, to June 14, 2023, in comparison to June 16, 2023, to August 17, 2023.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall

Over the three-month period from June 14, 2023, to August 17, 2023, the Probation Department's SEO canine unit conducted canine searches of all housing units at BJNJH on 32 occasions, 28 of which recovered contraband.

The searches were generally conducted Monday through Friday, resulting in the recovery of 13 unknown pills, 40 youth-manufactured weapons, 24 vape pens and cartridges, 10 marijuana cigarettes, 1 cellular phone, 26 cords/charging devices, 7 tattoo devices and pruno.⁴ There were no pills that were identified as fentanyl based upon appearance recovered during the three-month period.⁵ The searches also recovered items of less serious safety concern including electronic devices, pay/owe sheets, and PayPal account numbers.⁶

In comparison, from May 6, 2023, to June 14, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 34 searches, which recovered 54 youth-manufactured weapons, 34 vape pens, 22 vape pen cartridges, 5 marijuana cigarettes (including loose marijuana), 13 cellular phones, 34 cords/charging devices, 8 tattoo devices, residue resembling methamphetamine and black tar heroin, \$335 in cash, a razor blade and pruno.



⁴ Pruno is homemade alcoholic beverage made from fermented fruit, sugar, and yeast.

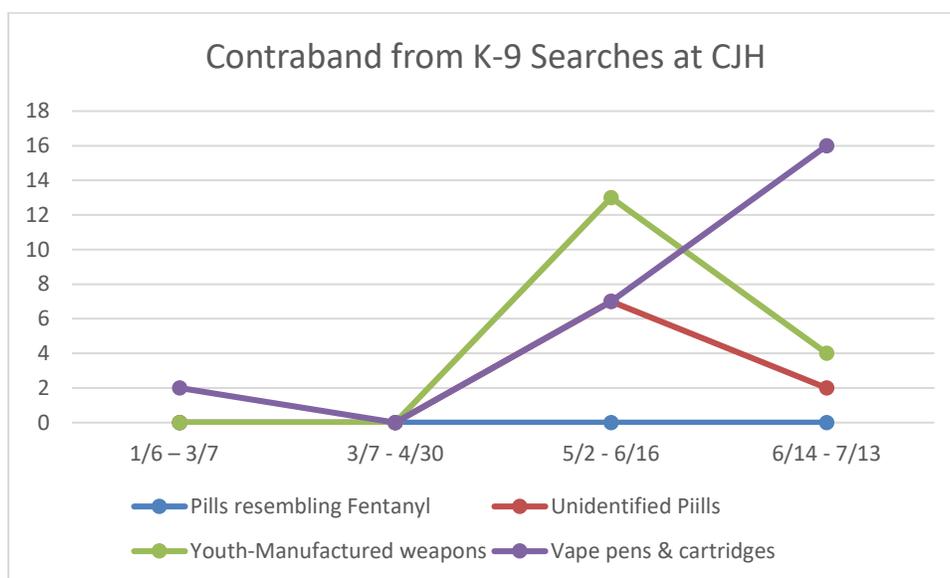
⁵ There were no pills consistent with indications of being Fentanyl. The pills were not tested for a definitive determination.

⁶ Pay/owe sheets are ledgers that keep track of charges and payments for illegal activities such as the sale of illegal drugs.

Frequency of K-9 Searches at BJNH				
Period	1/8 - 3/7	3/7 - 4/14	5/6 - 6/14	6/14 - 8/17
# K-9 Searches	7	18	26	32
Avg. days between searches	8.3	2.1	1.5	2.0

Central Juvenile Hall

From June 14, 2023, to July 13, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 20 canine searches at the housing units at CJH, resulting in the recovery of contraband on 7 occasions.⁷ During this period, the search teams recovered 16 vape pens and cartridges, 2 prescribed pills, 2 cellular phone, 2 cellular phone charging cord, 4 youth-manufactured weapon, 2 tattoo devices, 1 laptop, 1 electronic wi-fi device, and 1 facility key.⁸



In comparison, from May 2, 2023, to June 14, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 49 searches at CJH resulting in the recovery of 7 vape pens, 1 cellular phone, 6 cellular phone charging cords, 13 youth-manufactured weapons, 7 unknown

⁷ Interquest conducted 9 searches exclusively and 11 searches jointly with the Probation Department staff.

⁸ As noted above, the youths were transferred from CJH to LPJH July 13, 2023, so no additional searches were conducted at CJH after the transfer of youths.

pills, 1 smoking pipe, and 1 laptop. CJH is currently only utilized for same day medical treatment of youths and not for overnight housing. The Office of Inspector General recommends that the Probation Department recommends that searches continue as needed even if youths are not housed overnight at the facility.

Frequency of K-9 Searches at CJH				
Period	1/6 - 3/7	3/7 - 4/30	5/2 - 6/16	6/14 - 7/13
# K-9 Searches	12	11	49	20
Avg. days between searches	4.6	4.9	1.3	1.4

Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall

From July 13, 2023, to August 16, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 11 canine searches at the housing units at LPJH. During this two-month period, the search teams recovered contraband on 10 occasions resulting in the recovery of 8 vape pens and cartridges, 1 cellular phone, 4 electronic charging cords, 25 youth manufactured weapons, 3 marijuana cigarettes, 5 laptops, items for tattooing, and 1 key. There were no pills resembling Fentanyl recovered during the three-month period.

Effect of Increased Canine Search Teams

As noted in the previous report, the additional canine searches by the Probation Department aided in discovering and removing contraband from the juvenile halls. None of the searches since March 7th have recovered any suspected fentanyl pills, compared to the recovery of 123 pills in searches from January 8th to March 7th of this year. This significant reduction may indicate that the increased frequency of searches has acted to deter the introduction of illicit drugs into the halls. However, given the two apparent overdoses since the last report-back, illicit drugs continue to pose an ongoing concern. The Office of Inspector General recommends continuing the increased searches.

The Probation Department executive staff reports plans to retain a canine search expert to evaluate the effectiveness of the Probation Department's use of canines for contraband searches. The Probation Department should use the retained canine expert to provide guidance and training on best practices for searches with canines, in order to increase the discovery and recovery of illicit substances and contraband in the juvenile

halls by both SEO and Interquest. It should also use the expert to evaluate the effectiveness of Interquest to determine whether to continue to use its services.⁹

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, nor has the Office of Inspector General received any such complaints. The Probation Oversight Commission indicated that it has not received any complaints or concerns about canine searches from youths or members of the public during this review period.

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, BJNJH and LPJH from June 15, 2023, to August 17, 2023. The reports detailed the units searched, the Probation Department staff who conducted 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

There is a continued need for better security screening at the entrances of the facilities. Although the SEO unit has assisted the security staff at BJNJH, resulting in better security screening, there are still occurrences of staff bringing in cell phones and illicit drugs.

As noted in the Office of Inspector General's third report, the Probation Department executive staff continues to discuss the use of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (Sheriff's Department) Security Officers to (1) supplement the Probation

⁹ This report does not separate data for contraband found by Interquest from that found by SEO because Interquest primarily searched at CJH and the transfer of youth to LPJH during this timeframe resulted in a fewer number of searches at CJH. Historically, Interquest did not recover as much contraband as SEO.

Department's existing security staff used at the entrances of the juvenile halls, (2) increase perimeter checks of the juvenile hall facilities, (3) use its narcotics canine teams to assist Probation Department staff with contraband searches, and (4) conduct a security/contraband assessment of the juvenile halls.¹⁰ However, as noted in the previous report, the Sheriff's Department still faces low staffing levels and a significant number of vacancies for Security Officers, and currently may not have sufficient staff to assist the Probation Department. The Probation Department's executive staff indicated that until the Security Officers are available, it will create a new Probation Department Security Specialist position utilizing current or former law enforcement officers to assist with security inside and outside the facilities.¹¹ The Probation Department executive staff also plans to continue discussions with the Sheriff's Department regarding availability of Security Officers to work at the juvenile halls, and the SEO unit will also continue to assist with contraband screening at the facilities.

On May 23, 2023, the Probation Department received the requested security assessment of the juvenile halls from the Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department noted a number of deficiencies and recommends the Probation Department make significant changes.¹² The Office of Inspector General agrees with the recommendations of the Sheriff's Department.

E. FOLLOW-UP TO THIRD REPORT BACK

The Office of Inspector General has continued monitoring how illicit substances and contraband are entering the juvenile facilities as previously instructed by the Board, and provides the following update to its third report back:

1. **Packages thrown over perimeter walls at BJNJH:** Probation Department staff reported that the number of packages thrown over the walls has decreased since the previous report. However, this may be due to transfer of the youths housed there to LPJH. The Probation Department executive staff

¹⁰ The security at BJNJH is currently provided by Allied Universal Security Services, Securitas at LPJH, and the Probation Department staff at CJH due to the transfer of youths to LPJH. The Sheriff's Department provides uniformed non-peace officer Security Officers to provide security at the entrances to courthouses and other Los Angeles County facilities.

¹¹ It is unknown if the Probation Department will create this position using its current budget or if the position will not be filled until it is created and funded in the Probation Department's budget.

¹² Due to security concerns of the facilities, the Office of Inspector General will not disclose the Sheriff's Department's specific assessment concerns and recommendations in this public report.

has stated that the perimeter patrols continue despite the reduction of youths, to assist in reducing contraband being thrown over the walls.

2. **Entry into BJNJH:** The Office of Inspector General staff recently observed the main entrance into the facility used by visitors and staff. Members of the SEO unit continue to assist the contracted security officers with searches of visitors and staff and maintain a presence at the entryway Monday through Friday. Despite the increased measures, the entry security recently allowed a Probation Department staff member to bring food into the facility without submitting it to x-ray screening, which the Probation Department later believed introduced contraband into the facility. The Probation Department executive staff indicated that it is developing security plans which will include the purchase of updated screening machines and body scanners, to be used at both BJNJH and LPJH, and has mandated that all food items entering all juvenile halls be scanned by the x-ray screening device.
3. **Contraband Storage at BJNJH:** The Probation Department no longer stores seized contraband in an office closet, as described in the last report back. The Probation Department has installed contraband lockers for logging and storing recovered contraband. Staff members document seized contraband in a Security Incident Report and submit a copy of the report with the contraband to the Director, who places both the contraband and the copy of the report in the contraband locker, to store it securely and maintain a chain of custody so that the contraband can be used as evidence. All contraband recovered that was not in the possession of a youth, and therefore would not be needed for evidence, is sent to the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department for destruction or used in the canine training program.
4. **Entry into CJH:** In the previous report back, the Office of Inspector General noted concerns regarding the lack of any security screening at three of the four entrances at CJH. However, since the transfer of youths from CJH to LPJH, the Department only uses CJH for youths receiving same-day medical services. The Probation Department has staff placed at the main entrance and the gate used for entry and exit of the transportation vehicles.
5. **Entry into LPJH:**

The Office of Inspector General staff recently observed the main entrance into the facility used by visitors and staff. A contracted security service, Securitas,

conducts security screening that consistently requires all persons entering the facility to walk through a metal detector, while all belongings, including food, must go through the x-ray screening device. The security service appeared to conduct the screening properly and consistently.

F. 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 adheres to the following recommendations made in previous report backs:

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. Assess the reasons for the historically lower rates of contraband recovery by Interquest, its currently contracted canine search company, in comparison to the SEO's canine search unit.¹³
3. Investigate violations of all Probation Department policies on visitation, contraband possession, and possession of excess items and impose appropriate discipline for any violations.
4. The new mandate that all food brought into the facilities must be subject to the x-ray screening device should be fully enforced.
5. Assess the feasibility of utilizing a "key card" security system in replacement of metal keys.

MH:sf

c: Guillermo Viera Rosa, Interim Chief Probation Officer
Fesia Davenport, Chief Executive Officer
Celia Zavala, Executive Officer
Dawyn R. Harrison, County Counsel
Wendelyn Julien, Executive Director, Probation Oversight Commission

¹³ See footnote 8 *ante*.