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October 1, 2024

TO: Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath, Chair
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
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FROM: Max Huntsman 
Inspector General

SUBJECT: **REPORT BACK ON TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:
PROPER MAINTENANCE AND ACCOUNTING FOR ALL CAMERAS IN
THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY JAILS, COURT HOLDING TANKS AND
PATROL STATION LOCKUPS (ITEM 5, AGENDA OF JUNE 4, 2024)**

I. Background

On June 4, 2024, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion titled, [Transparency and Accountability: Proper Maintenance and Accounting for All Cameras in the Los Angeles County Jails, Court Holding Tanks, and Patrol Station Lockups](#). The motion requests the Sheriff's Department and directs the Office of the County Counsel (County Counsel), the Office of Inspector General, and the Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission (COC) to collaboratively draft policies related to the cameras in jails, court holding tanks, and station lockups. The motion addresses fixed Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZZ) cameras. For ease of reference, we sometimes refer to these fixed cameras as CCTV, standing for closed circuit television, or CCTV cameras. The Office of Inspector General made efforts to collaborate with The Sheriff's Department, County Counsel, and the COC by attending one joint meeting on the subject matter of this motion and by sharing a draft of this report. The Sheriff's Department is reporting separately. County Counsel reviewed a draft of the Sheriff's Department report as well, expressed no objections to either report, and will not be reporting separately. The COC expressed its concurrence in this report.

Our review of the Sheriff's Department policies and practices on CCTV in the jails reveals two primary issues which we bring to your attention: the lack of real-time monitoring¹ and gaps in the Department's policies on retention of CCTV video.

II. The Sheriff's Department should monitor CCTV cameras in real time to identify non-working cameras, improve safety for people in custody, and deter misconduct

The Sheriff's Department's Custody Division Manual (CDM) [section 7-06/010.00, Video and Audio Recording Procedures](#), addresses CCTV cameras (which it refers to as "fixed video surveillance"), as well as the use of portable video cameras to record incidents and investigations and the recording of jail radio traffic. The policy describes the purpose of the CCTV cameras, stating:

The Sheriff's Department's primary objectives with fixed video surveillance are to:

- Record/document events as they occur;
- Provide real-time intelligence for Department personnel;
- Provide video evidence of actions by inmates and staff;
- Produce a deterrent effect against inmate violence;
- Provide for post-incident analysis.

Several of the policy's stated objectives for CCTV can be achieved largely or only through **real-time monitoring** of fixed cameras. Certainly, CCTV cameras "provide real-time intelligence for Department personnel" only if the Department monitors the cameras in real time. Live monitoring of cameras allows for a more rapid response to critical incidents thereby enhancing the safety of inmates and staff within Sheriff's Department custodial facilities. If inmates know that cameras are continuously monitored, there is a greater deterrent effect against inmate violence. Deputies who know that the cameras are being monitored in real-time for Title 15 safety checks required by law may be more diligent in complying with the requirements of the checks and adhering to other Department policies and allows immediate corrective steps, which also enhances safety. Real-time monitoring also helps to achieve the objectives of the

¹ An October 2017 report by the Office of Inspector General, [Evaluation of the Implementation of Fixed Cameras in the Los Angeles County Jails](#), used the term "real-time monitoring" to mean that the cameras were *receiving live feed*, not that Sheriff's Department staff were actually watching that feed in real time. This report uses the terms "real-time monitoring" and "live monitoring" interchangeably to refer to the *continuous observation* of the live feed from the cameras by Sheriff's Department staff.

Board motion, by revealing in real-time whether the cameras are in working order and capturing the areas they are set to monitor.

Despite the importance of real-time monitoring to the Sheriff Department's stated objectives for CCTV, the Department has no policy or directives that require real-time monitoring, nor does it in practice assign staff to monitor the cameras continuously.

To illustrate how real-time monitoring enhances safety in the custodial facilities, we summarize some recent incidents where live monitoring of CCTV cameras may have prevented deaths attributed to drug overdoses, illness, or violent attacks on persons in custody, some of which resulted in the death of an inmate. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of circumstances where the failure to real-time monitor CCTV may have resulted in failing to protect people in custody, but rather a sample of instances to point out the necessity of real-time monitoring.

- On July 22, 2024, inmates housed at Men's Central Jail (MCJ) dorm 5800 notified Sheriff's Department personnel of an inmate who was unresponsive in the dorm. Deputies entered the dorm around 8:40 a.m. and found the individual lying on a mattress on the floor between two bunk beds. Deputies rendered aid by performing CPR and administering Narcan, but neither procedure worked to revive him. Medical personnel responded shortly thereafter and continued life-saving measures, but the man could not be resuscitated. CCTV video was retrieved and viewed. Two days prior to his death, the inmate could be seen swaying and vomiting. On July 21st at 9:00 a.m., the day before this incident, video recording shows him taking an unknown number of pills. On the same day, at around 5:28 p.m., the video shows him looking unwell and lying down between the two bunk beds. Two inmates brought him dinner and gave him towels. Between 5:30 p.m., and the deputies' discovery the next day at 8:42 a.m., the CCTV video shows several inmates passing by the inmate in question. Fellow inmates are seen kicking the inmate's foot without any physical reaction to the kicks; inmates are also seen hovering over him intermittently throughout the night.

This particular dorm requires 30-minute Title 15 safety checks. None of the deputies noted the inmate in distress during their checks. Live monitoring of the CCTV in this dorm would likely have alerted Sheriff's Department personnel of the fact that the man appeared to be in medical distress at various times in the two days before deputies found him completely unresponsive. The failure of staff

to properly conduct Title 15 safety checks is an ongoing problem for the Sheriff's Department. This example illustrates how real-time monitoring of CCTV can both provide a direct check on the safety of persons in the facility and can also ensure that staff are conducting safety checks thoroughly and accurately.

- On April 10, 2024, during a Title 15 safety check in dorm 628 of North County Correctional Facility (NCCF), deputies discovered an individual lying on his bunk unresponsive, pale in color, and not breathing. A deputy noticed two Narcan cannisters on the floor near the bunk. Deputies and medical professionals attempted to resuscitate the person by administering Narcan, performing CPR, and using the AED; however, the individual was pronounced dead at the scene. After the death, CCTV video was retrieved and viewed. The video showed a Title 15 safety check conducted at 8:24 a.m., where the deceased can be seen moving about the dorm. Around 8:42 a.m., the deceased can be seen lying on his bunk. At 8:43 a.m., two unnamed inmates housed in the dorm retrieved two Narcan cannisters from the front of the dorm and administered it to the deceased. Shortly after administering the doses, one of the individuals started chest compressions. None of the people in the dorm alerted Sheriff's Department personnel or medical staff that a person was in medical distress.

While the Title 15 safety checks were conducted in a timely fashion, had Sheriff's Department staff been monitoring the CCTV cameras in real-time, deputies could have noticed the efforts by the inmates to resuscitate the deceased, rendered aid more quickly, and possibly prevented a death.

- On June 13, 2023, during a Title 15 safety check in dorm 5500 of MCJ, deputies found an individual unresponsive on a bunk with signs of trauma to his head and face. The deputies and medical staff performed life-saving measures until paramedics arrived and pronounced the person dead. After the incident, CCTV video was reviewed. The video shows three inmates violently assaulting the victim in the shower area of the dorm and leaving the grievously injured victim unattended in the shower area. The victim remained in the shower area for two hours until two inmates carried him out and placed him on a bunk close to the showers. Deputies conducted five Title 15 safety checks without noticing the victim in the two and a half-hour period from when the victim was attacked until deputies found him on the bunk.

Deputies made errors in conducting quality Title 15 safety checks, in ensuring all inmates were accounted for when doing the inmate counts, and in failing to notice blatant red flags, such as inmates congregating inside the bathroom area during the fight, tenting the shower area, and carrying a body from the shower area to the bunk – all of which occurred right in front of the deputy booth, where deputies are supposed to be stationed. Other failures of the staff aside, live monitoring of CCTV cameras would have alerted deputies to the fight in real time and to the movements of the victim following the attack such that deputies could have shortened the attack or rendered aid to the victim hours earlier, when he might have been saved.

- On May 13, 2023, during a Title 15 safety check in dorm 3200, row D, of MCJ, a deputy discovered an individual unresponsive in his cell. The individual was housed alone in a two-person cell. Deputies found him slouched over with his head resting on the cell bars and his hands tucked under his body. Deputies noted foam around the individual's mouth and nostrils. Deputies and MCJ medical staff administered four doses of Narcan, administered CPR and the AED; none of these life-saving measures worked and the individual was pronounced dead a short while later. A later review of the CCTV video determined that deputies conducted a total of ten Title 15 safety checks over a period of five hours during which the individual had been in exactly the same position, before a deputy finally noted the alarming posture and intervened. Again, real-time monitoring might have allowed deputies to observe the odd and unchanging posture and to provide aid more quickly.
- On June 24, 2023, the Los Angeles Times (The Times) reported it had come into possession of a thumb drive which contained videos of several incidents that occurred in Sheriff's Department custodial facilities.² The Times article led with an incident that was captured on jail CCTV cameras and downloaded onto the thumb drive. The video shows several inmates attacking an individual at MCJ. The attack occurred over a period of time; yet no personnel intervened to stop the attack. In response to a question as to why the camera feeds are not viewed in real time, the Times article reports that a member of the Sheriff's Department command staff said, "We now have monitors in some staff stations but still do not have the staff to monitor them full-time."

² [Blakinger, Keri, *Fights, beatings and a birth: Videos smuggled out of L.A. Jails reveal violence, neglect, Los Angeles Times \(June 24, 2023\).*](#)

The Sheriff's Department policy should also require real-time monitoring of cameras in order to test the recording functionality of each camera and serve as a system to audit the cameras. In addition, the Sheriff's Department should maintain its current policy in CDM 7-06/010.00 that fixed video equipment be inspected at the beginning of each shift by the watch commander on duty as detailed in the policy. A recent in-custody death highlighted the necessity of confirming that CCTV cameras are functional and recording:

On March 26, 2024, during a Title 15 safety check of MCJ 7200, an individual was found unresponsive inside his single man cell, and later pronounced dead. When Sheriff's Department staff sought CCTV video to find out more about the incident, they discovered that while the camera appeared to be working, the recording capabilities had malfunctioned, and CCTV video was not available for review. Due to the lack of video, the investigation was unable to determine the quality of the Title 15 safety checks and may have failed to preserve evidence relating to the death.

At recent In-Custody Death Reviews, these incidents have generated discussions among Sheriff's Department custody personnel and Correctional Health Services (CHS) medical staff about finally exploring options of live monitoring cameras at facilities. MCJ and Pitchess Detention Center (PDC) already have designated areas where Sheriff's Department personnel can be stationed to conduct real-time monitoring of certain areas in these facilities. Having the technology to view the video in real time, and yet failing to use this technology to its maximum potential, must be addressed by implementing a policy that CCTV cameras be monitored in real time and assigning staff to do so.

III. Sheriff's Department video retention policies leave gaps and ambiguities resulting in non-compliance with the requirements of California law

The issue of retention of video, while not raised in the Board motion, should be addressed in Sheriff's Department policy to resolve four concerns. First, no Department policy clearly provides guidance for retention of video from station jails. While CDM section 7-06/010.00 sets forth a retention policy for CCTV recordings in the Custody Division, it is not clear that this policy applies to station jails operated by the Patrol Division. Second, the CDM retention policy does not appear to comply with state law. California Government Code section 26202.6 provides that "the head of a department of a county, after one year, may destroy recordings of routine video monitoring" (including routine video monitoring from jail observation and monitoring systems), but requires that

the destruction “shall be approved by the legislative body and the written consent of the agency attorney shall be obtained.” But the CDM provides that after one year, recordings of incidents may “thereafter [be] destroyed at the discretion of the watch commander.” By leaving the destruction of video after 12 months to the discretion of the watch commander rather than the head of the department, and without the required approval of the legislative body and written consent of the agency attorney, the CDM policy fails to follow the requirements of Government Code section 26202.6. Third, the law requires that video evidence be preserved during the pendency of any litigation. While the CDM policy authorizes destruction only of video of incidents “not associated with an URN or reference number,” it does not expressly state that video relevant to any litigation shall not be destroyed. Fourth and finally, one sentence in the CDM policy states that CCTV recordings “shall be retained in electronic storage devices for a minimum of twelve (12) months, unless otherwise directed in writing by the respective Custody Services Division chief.” While this may be intended to allow a Custody Services Division chief to order a longer retention period, the sentence suggests that a chief can order video destroyed sooner than 12 months after an incident, in violation of state law. Policy revisions to the CDM and the Sheriff’s Department Manual of Policy and Procedure should address these retention issues.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the Office of Inspector General makes the following recommendations to the Sheriff’s Department’s CCTV policies practices, and directives:

1. Implement policies that require real-time monitoring of all CCTV cameras.
2. Implement a practice that staff be assigned to real-time monitor all cameras 24 hours a day.
3. Build any infrastructure necessary to accommodate real-time monitoring.
4. Issue directives that staff assigned to real-time monitors must do so.
5. Implement policies to hold deputies accountable for failing to monitor the cameras in real time if assigned to that duty.
6. Maintain the policy in CDM 7-06/010.00 of the watch commander checking CCTV cameras at the beginning of each shift by compliance with the steps set forth in the CDM and that staff assigned to real-time monitoring also ensure equipment functionality, meaning that all cameras are in proper working condition at all times and that the cameras are set to capture the areas they are intended to monitor.

7. Revise Sheriff's Department policies to include retention of all routine video monitoring in all custodial facilities including jails, station lockups, and court holding cells for a period of 12 months.
8. Revise Sheriff's Department policies to include that only the Sheriff may destroy recordings after the expiration of the 12 month retention period, and only with the approval of the Board of Supervisors and written consent of County Counsel.
9. Revise Sheriff's Department policies to include the retention of video until the conclusion of any civil litigation or criminal proceedings for which the video has evidentiary value.
10. Revise Sheriff's Department policies to clarify that a Custody Service Division chief can order the retention of video for longer than 12 months, but cannot order destruction of video sooner than 12 months after an incident.

c: Robert G. Luna, Sheriff
Fesia Davenport, Chief Executive Officer
Edward Yen, Executive Officer
Dawyn Harrison, County Counsel
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