



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

312 SOUTH HILL STREET, THIRD FLOOR
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90013
(213) 974-6100
<http://oig.lacounty.gov>

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

HILDA L. SOLIS
HOLLY J. MITCHELL
LINDSEY P. HORVATH
JANICE HAHN
KATHRYN BARGER

MAX HUNTSMAN
INSPECTOR GENERAL

July 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", written over the printed name.

SUBJECT: **THIRD 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 implementing policies and procedures to address the flow of contraband and illicit substances that are entering the County's juvenile halls, and 60 days thereafter. 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) 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 back on May 9, 2023, and now provides this third 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 the ways in which 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.

As noted in the Office of Inspector General's second report, 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). For this reporting period, 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, 2023.¹ The information included the date, time, names of staff involved in the searches, items discovered, and information deemed relevant by the Probation Department. A comparison was made between canine searches conducted during the period of May 2023 and June 2023 to those conducted during the period of March 2023 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 appears that the expanded canine searches continue to aid in discovering and recovering contraband in the juvenile halls.

Despite these increased efforts, during this reporting period over the course of one weekend four youths from BJNJH were hospitalized due to suspected ingestion of illicit drugs. While the youths survived and returned to the facility, these incidents indicate that illicit drugs are still entering the juvenile hall facilities and the Probation Department must be diligent in its prevention efforts.

¹ The Probation Department provided a summary of the searches conducted by SEO staff canine units and Interquest, for a period of May 2, 2023, to June 14, 2023.

Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall

From May 6, 2023, to June 14, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 34 canine searches of the housing units at BJNJH, 26 by the SEO canine unit and 9 by Interquest. During this two-month period, the search teams recovered contraband 26 times.

The searches were daily, Monday through Friday. As a result of the 34 searches the Probation Department recovered 3 unknown pills, 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, pruno,² a facility key, a bullet, 3 shell casings, a digital scale, pay/owe sheets,³ photographs relating to gang activity, and a \$100 counterfeit bill. There were no pills resembling fentanyl recovered during the two-month period. Items of less serious concern were also recovered including excessive food, excessive clothing, excessive bedding, electronic devices, matches, and pornography.

In comparison, from March 7, 2023, to April 30, 2023, the Probation Department conducted only 18 searches, resulting in the recovery of 3 youth manufactured weapons, 115 vape pens, 25 vape pen cartridges, 3 tobacco cigarettes, 5 marijuana cigarettes, 2 lighters, and 48 unidentified pills. The Probation Department almost doubled the number of searches since the Office of Inspector General's second report. There has been a significant reduction in the recovery of fentanyl pills as well as other contraband, which suggests the increased searches may be effective. The Office of Inspector General recommends continuing the increased searches.

Central Juvenile Hall

From May 2, 2023, to June 16, 2023, the Probation Department conducted 49 canine searches at the housing units at CJH, 25 by SEO canine unit and 24 by the Interquest. During this two-month period, the search teams recovered contraband 16 times, resulting in the recovery of 7 vape pens, 1 cellular phone, 6 cellular phone charging cords, 13 youth manufactured weapons, 7 unknown pills, 1 smoking pipe, and 1 laptop.

² Pruno is homemade alcoholic beverage made from fermented fruit, sugar, and yeast. A "vape pen" is an electronic device shaped like a pen that is used to inhale vapor from tobacco or marijuana oil.

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

In comparison, from March 7, 2023, to April 30, 2023, the Probation Department conducted only 11 searches at CJH resulting in the recovery of 1 cell phone charging cord. The Probation Department conducted four times as many searches during the current reporting period compared to the previous period. The result was a significant increase in recovered contraband.

Once again, based on the information provided by the Probation Department, there is a noticeable difference in the amount of contraband recovered by the SEO unit compared to Interquest. In fact, during the latest review period, Interquest did not recover any contraband during its 24 searches, whereas the SEO unit recovered contraband in all its searches except one. This may be attributable to better technique or expertise used by the SEO unit, or a lack of effort by Interquest. The Office of Inspector General recommends the Probation Department evaluate the effectiveness of Interquest's search methods to ensure the Probation Department is obtaining the best use of its budgeted resources.

In addition to leading to the discovery of contraband, frequent canine searches may be acting as a deterrent to the introduction of contraband into the halls, which might explain the reduction in the discovery of fentanyl.

The Probation Department previously indicated that it would review the effectiveness of the additional searches and determine if more frequent canine searches are needed. This analysis was not completed, and the Office of Inspector General recommends that the Probation Department complete such a review.

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.

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 May 2, 2023, to June 14, 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

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 BJNH, resulting in better security screening, the Office of Inspector General staff witnessed individuals continuing to come into CJH and placing bags and food items on top of the x-ray scanner avoiding screening. In addition, bags that are put through the x-ray scanner are not consistently monitored. The Office of Inspector General staff brought this to the Probation Department's executive staff's attention and in response, the executive staff issued a memorandum informing the contracted security officers that **all** bags, including food, are to be scanned by the x-ray machine. The Office of Inspector General will continue to monitor the security screening at both juvenile facilities.

As noted in the Office of Inspector General's previous report, the Probation Department 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,⁴ (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 continues to discuss the use of the Sheriff's Department Security Officers, but their availability is still hampered by low staffing levels and a significant number of vacancies for that position. In the meantime, the Probation Department is utilizing its SEO unit at BJNH and Probation Department field staff at

⁴ 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.

CJH to assist with security screening. In addition, canines are deployed daily at each facility for “sniff” searches.⁵ The Sheriff’s Department is unable to anticipate when its Security Officer vacancies will be filled or when its current staffing shortage will resolve. However, 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.

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 Sheriff’s Department conducted the security assessments for CJH, BJNJH and Los Padriños Juvenile Hall, and the results have been provided to the Probation Department.

E. FOLLOW-UP TO FIRST REPORT

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 first report back:

1. **Packages thrown over perimeter walls at BJNJH:** Probation Department staff reported that there has been no change in the frequency of packages being thrown over the walls since the Office of Inspector General’s first report. However, Probation Department executive staff has stated that there are increased perimeter patrols to assist in reducing contraband being thrown over the walls.
2. **Entry into the BJNJH:** The Office of Inspector General staff recently observed the main entrance into the facility used by visitors and staff. The Probation Department has initiated a new policy at both BJNJH and CJH requiring a clear bag to be used by all visitors and staff carrying personal items into the facilities. This should assist in preventing the introduction of contraband into the facilities. Also, members of the SEO unit are assisting the

⁵ Sniff searches are canines brought into the facility to smell around the facility for contraband. If the canines indicate they smelled contraband, a search is then conducted by the SEO staff.

contracted security officers with searches of visitors and staff and are present at the entryway Monday through Friday.

3. **Unauthorized Food Deliveries:** As reported in the first report back, the youths received contraband in the facility by utilizing people appearing to deliver food ordered by telephone. As a result, the Probation Department has ended the use of outside food delivery services to staff at both BJNJH and CJH.
4. **Contraband Storage at BJNJH:** Contraband at BJNJH continues to be stored in an office closet as previously reported.
5. **Entry into CJH:** As noted in its first report back, the Office of Inspector General was concerned regarding the lack of any security screening at three of the four entrances at CJH. The Probation Department staff continue to have the ability to enter the facility at the side, bus transportation, and Internal Services Department (ISD) entrances without being subject to a security search prior to entering the facility. The Office of Inspector General staff recently observed a Probation Department staff member exit the facility through the side entrance using a key that opens all gates and doors at the facility. Upon inquiring why that person had the key, the Office of Inspector General staff was informed that such keys may be requested and checked out to any of the Deputy Probation Officers at the facility and that there are approximately **600 such keys**. This type of widespread access to facility gates effectively negates the other security measures implemented by the Probation Department.

In response to the Office of Inspector General's concerns, the Probation Department executive staff reported that a detention officer has been placed at the side entrance to prevent staff from using the exit until the locks are changed to allow only supervisors access. The Office of Inspector General recommends the use of a key card system, which has the following advantages over keys: (1) it allows staff access to only specific authorized areas, (2) access can be allowed/restricted by shifts, (3) provides a record of which staff member accessed a specific gate/door, and (4) allows for faster entry into the area in an emergency, removing the problem of identifying the proper key to use for the door/gate.

6. **Packages thrown into CJH:** The Office of Inspector General staff was informed by the Probation Department staff that there has not been a change in the frequency of packages thrown over the walls at CJH since the first report. However, Probation Department executive staff reported that there are increased perimeter patrols and staff have been diligent in responding to sightings of drones flying over the facility.
7. **Contraband Storage at CJH:** Contraband is no longer stored in a tote bag on a coat rack as previously reported in the first report. The Probation Department has installed contraband lockers for logging and storing recovered contraband. The contraband is documented in a Security Incident Report and submitted to management. A copy of the report is submitted with the contraband to the Director and placed in the contraband locker. All contraband that is recovered that was not in the possession of a youth is sent to the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department for destruction or used in the Canine Training program. This is a marked improvement by the Probation Department of its handling of recovered contraband at CJH.

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 continues to make 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. Assess 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.
4. Increase in efforts searching items brought into the facilities, including searching inside of bags and purses for contraband. All food containers should be opened for visual check.

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 Harrison, County Counsel
Wendelyn Julien, Executive Director, Probation Oversight Commission