

San Diego County Juvenile Justice Commission Inspection Worksheet

East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility	
Facility Address: 446 Alta Rd. #6100 San Diego, CA 92158	Date of Inspection: November 16, 2022
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The San Diego County Juvenile Justice Commission is a state-mandated, court-appointed citizens' commission. Its purpose is to inquire into the administration of juvenile court law in San Diego County, to provide leadership for citizen action and to promote an effective juvenile justice system operated in an environment of credibility, dignity, fairness and respect for the youth of San Diego County.

I. Executive Summary

A. Institution Overview

This year's inspection for San Diego County Probation Juvenile Facilities was modified compared to previous years. The Probation Department has had a number of changes to its facilities in Calendar Years 2021 and 2022. Movement of youth occurred from facility to facility due to the closure of Kearny Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility and opening of the Youth Transition Campus (YTC). The focus of this inspection was to learn what changes have been made this year and the plans for the return of the Department of Justice Youth due to the changes made by the State.

The East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility (EMJDF) was toured by the Commission November 16, 2022. On the day of the inspection there were a total of 122 general population youth (28 female and 94 male youths). Due to the changes in facility composition EMJDF now houses all general population youth awaiting court hearings and all committed youth are housed at the YTC. This is the first year since the facility opened in 2004 that the facility has housed the female population. Staff reported there was a learning curve with working with the female population as they have different needs than the male population. The staff have made adjustments to ensure the needs of the female population are addressed. Currently EMJDF is the intake facility for the Probation Department. A new intake facility is being constructed with an anticipated opening of December 2023.

A noticeable change at EMJDF involved Behavioral Health. In the past not all youth were assigned a clinician. This year the Stabilization and Treatment Team (STAT) assigns a clinician to every youth that enters the facility. This provides an opportunity for consistency and youth receiving the necessary services youth need. If the clinician assigned to the youth is not in the facility another clinician will see the youth if there is a need for the youth to see the clinician. The clinicians are on a 4 day per week/10-hour day (4/10) schedule. Some clinicians work Sunday through Wednesday and others Wednesday through Saturday. This provides clinician coverage every day of the week. The Department is commended for making this change where youth are able to receive mental health services on any given day. One problem brought up was that of the contract with the medical clinic. Previously the contract with medical services provided support services to Behavioral Health staff that are not included in the current contract with Wellpath and Probation. Behavioral Health staff were unaware of the changes as they were not consulted when the current contract was revisited. The plan is to have 12 youth per unit maximum but may be revisited depending on the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) population.

It is also noted Behavioral Health and the medical clinic continue to use two separate electronic file systems. This provides limited information sharing due to limited access. There are clinic staff on from 2pm to 10pm and one on from 10pm to 6am. The schedule was researched prior to implementation.

In discussing the passage of SB823, DJJ Realignment Implementation, Probation is in the process of remodeling six units to soften the look of the units to make them more “home like”. The concrete beds are being removed and beds similar to those at the Youth Transition Campus (YTC) are being installed. The flooring will be vinyl and resemble wood flooring. Windows will be changed and murals will be painted on the walls. Changes to the staff desk, the dayroom and classrooms are part of the remodel as well. Meeting spaces will be added as well as a conference room and two offices.

The track and field area continues to be used by the youth in the facility and continues to add more possibilities for physical health.

School now starts at 8:30 am, instead of 8:00 am, to ensure youth have the appropriate amount of sleep as studies have suggested. The school principal related youth are coming to the facility with higher educational needs. Many students in the facility have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). When a youth enters the facility a school staff will meet with the youth and a Transition Team works with the youth. There are two mental health counselors that rotate between YTC and EMJDF. The school has youth lead conferences that focus on how the youth feels they are doing; their goals and interests are also discussed.

There is a “Daily Huddle” where Probation, school, Behavioral Health and medical meet each day for approximately 15 minutes to discuss any issues with individual youth. This allows for information exchange and better service by all entities working with the youth. There is also a weekly meeting with probation and all collaborative partners. Once per month all partners meet with the Deputy Chief. This allows for better communication.

The school continues to work with youth who are enrolled in college classes. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 25 youth taking college classes. This opportunity for youth was introduced in the early 2000’s and continues to flourish.

While the Career Technical Education (CTE) courses were moved to YTC, the school at EMJDF is planning to bring some CTE programs online.

During the inspection we discussed phone access for youth. In the past phone calls were made via collect calls and calls were recorded by the company providing phone service. This is no longer the case. Phone calls are made free of charge and are not recorded since July 2021. Visitation is available on a daily basis via in person and virtually. Another addition includes people that have “lived experience” coming to the facility to work with the youth. Mentors also come to the facility.

Prior to the inspection date the Juvenile Justice Commission received information that staffing at the facilities was low and could fall below Title 15 requirements. To avoid this the department ordered field service staff to work an overtime shift. During the inspection it was learned the department offered an elective class for field staff. This is a concern as the class was elective and field staff did not have to attend. There were staff who have not worked in the institutions for many years or not at all. The department stated the staff received basic safety and security training and would not be left alone with the youth. This is in line with

Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) requirements and has been done throughout California. This was being done only during the Juvenile Institutions CORE training for new hires. Staffing has been an issue for many years and became worse over the past 6 years. The department needs to address this issue and find out why staff are leaving the department.

B. Commission Comments and Recommendations

Acknowledging the facility has had many changes in 2021 the Juvenile Justice Commission recommends:

1. Probation to include all collaborative agencies that are or can be affected when renewing or revising contracts.
2. Behavioral Health Services (BHS) and the medical clinic continue to use two separate electronic file systems for medical records, but staff from those areas should be given full access to both systems.
3. Probation and San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) should ensure CTE courses are offered at EMJDF.
4. Probation should evaluate the staffing issue, determine why staff are not remaining and address the issues immediately.