
DN Grand Jury Response

August 17, 2024

July 24, 2024

Honorable Judge

Darrin McElfresh

Del Norte County

Superior Court

450 H Street

Crescent City Ca 95531

Your Honor,

The following correspondence is in response to the Del Norte County Grand Jury Report 2023-2024, specifically regarding the published findings related to “Del Norte County Jail”.

FINDINGS:

FI: Conditions in the jail such as mold, flooding toilets, and asbestos are a health hazard for both inmates and staff.

RESPONSE: Respondent Agrees with finding:

The Sheriff is working with County Administration on a remodel project for the jail to upgrade and solve the ongoing issues noted. An Engineering plan has been established and the County Administration is in the process of, and making preparations for, the bid process to find a contractor to begin work on the jail in the future. The estimated overall cost of the project is just over 9 million dollars. Procuring funding for the project is underway. A large sum will be coming from the USDA Rural Communities Facilities grants. The funding sources are still being established and jail remodeling will likely be conducted in phases as funding sources allow. Currently there are two housing units in the jail that have been completely refurbished by the Del Norte County Building Maintenance crew. A 3rd housing unit is set to be refurbished this summer.

F2: The insufficient staffing that results in twelve hour shifts and safety check failures is a security threat to staff and inmates.

RESPONSE: Respondent agrees partially to this finding:

Dated May 14 2024 the BSCC conducted a comprehensive inspection follow up and found DNSO to be in compliance with safety checks in general. The specific area of noncompliance is noted in the sobering cells area specifically. Documentation was primarily the compliance concern in this area. We have changed our standards of practice for the sobering cell area security checks and installed a digital monitoring system RFID. The new digital system logs each safety check electronically. The RFID system ensures tracking and logging of each safety check throughout the entire facility, which should curtail the documentation concerns in the future. The DNSO Corrections staff has been working 12 hours shifts for many years as part of their negotiated work day.

F3: Non-Competitive compensation makes it difficult to recruit new staff:

RESPONSE: Respondent Agrees with finding:

The Sheriff concurs with this analysis and has no control over salaries of County Employees. The Sheriff is encouraging the Board of Supervisors to continue with the County Strategic Plan that includes a comprehensive study of the county salary structure as soon as possible. For the safety of the public it is imperative to continue to evaluate and approach innovative ideas to increase salaries. The Sheriff's Office is at approximately 70 percent staffing shortage. Compensation is a very strong component of the hiring crises and retention.

F4: Adverse working conditions and non-competitive compensation make it difficult to retain staff:

RESPONSE: Respondent agrees with finding:

Working with inmates can be extremely dangerous. We continue to lose quality employees to higher paying jobs such as California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Competitive compensation is a struggle for Del Norte County. A compensation study is underway, which is part of the County Strategic Plan. The compensation study will help the Board of Supervisors to evaluate the pay scale for all DNSO staff. The Sheriff strongly encourages immediate action once the study is complete if there is concrete evidence that salaries are well below average.

F5: The position and size of mirrors and monitors in the control pod create blind spots for staff and present a security risk for both inmates and staff.

RESPONSE: Respondent agrees with finding:

The Del Norte County IT Department has recently replaced the video monitors in the control pod to correct the visibility concerns. A new camera has been placed in the exchange area that has a 360 degree view; there will be new cameras with this technology placed throughout the jail which will enhance surveillance.

F6: Broken Windows create visibility problems. RESPONSE: Respondent agrees with finding:

A number of windows have been replaced within the facility. There are still several broken windows that do need to be replaced by County Building Maintenance. I concur that the noted windows do pose a risk for the safety of staff and inmates. Safety glass does take a number of months to arrive; as soon as the ordered safety glass arrives we will ensure installation.

F7: Unsecured inmate records are at risk for unauthorized access. RESPONSE: Respondent partially agrees with finding:

Remodeling of D tank is complete and the doorway into the recreation room was evaluated and secured. Inmates do not have access to this area. Confirmation was made that the doorway leading to the recreation room by policy remains closed at all times.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. One factor in losing staff has been that newly hired graduates stay a year and then leave for jobs elsewhere. Offer Incentives such as paying a percentage of student debt each year beyond the first year of service.

RESPONSE: Recommendation has been implemented:

The Sheriffs Employee Association has negotiated an incentive for certificates and longevity to help in this area.

R2. Ensure USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Projects grants for jail improvements are applied for and followed up on.

RESPONSE: Recommendation has been implemented and is in progress.

The County administration has been working with the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Project Grants folks consistently. The USDA site visit took place during the week of July 15th 2024 and

progress continues. It is difficult to obtain a time frame. The Sheriff will forward this recommendation to the County Administration as they are responsible for reporting to the Board of Supervisors in relation to county buildings and maintenance.

R3. Investigate why there is a problem with the Del Norte County Maintenance Department. RESPONSE: Recommendation does not fall within the Sheriff's control.

The Sheriff has no control over the building maintenance division. The Building Maintenance Division is under the umbrella of the Board of Supervisors. The Sheriff will advise the County CAO of this recommendation.

R4. Place unsecured inmate records in a secure location. offsite if necessary. RESPONSE: Recommendation has been implemented as follows.

The doorway to the storage room has been secured and the dorm area that was being remodeled has been resealed and secured ensuring no access can be made without a key.

RS. Institute a procedure for reporting when the attorney phone is out of order. RESPONSE: Recommendation has been implemented

Upon the notification to staff that the attorney phone is out of order staff will create a help desk ticket. The time frame for repair depends upon the ability of IT staff to respond to troubleshoot the system failure. The Sheriff has no control over building maintenance or IT other than the ability to make notification through the Del Norte County help ticket system.

Respectfully,

Garrett Scott,

Sheriff-Coroner

Del Norte County