



**2006-2007 Yuba County Grand Jury
Final Report**

**Yuba County Probation Department:
Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall
Maxine Singer Youth Guidance Center**

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Subject of Investigation

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Maxine Singer Youth Guidance Center**

Reason for Investigation

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”
John W. Whitehead, *The Stealing of America*, 1983

California Penal Code section 919(b) mandates that the Grand Jury annually inquire into the state of all prisons and jails located in the county and issue comments based on the findings of the inquiries. It has been the custom of the Yuba County Grand Jury to include all juvenile detention facilities as well.

Background

The Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall and Maxine Singer Youth Guidance Center (Camp Singer) located in Marysville was established in 1976 under a joint powers agreement between Yuba and Sutter Counties, with the Yuba County Probation Department acting as the administrative agency.

The main “Hall” is a “lock-down,” 60-bed detention facility that houses both male and female minors. The length of stay varies, depending on Juvenile Court actions and/or transfers to other jurisdictions or agencies. (See, e.g., Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code secs. 601, 602, 654, and 707.) This self-contained facility is comprised of three wings: a common area, classrooms and an outdoor recreation area. The detainees are housed according to gender and only intermingle during school hours and at meal time.

The Juvenile Hall also includes a separate 15-bed Secure Housing Unit for the detention of serious and violent juvenile offenders. This Secure Housing Unit, commonly referred to as the “SHU,” is a single building with its own outdoor recreation area, classroom, shower and bathrooms.

Camp Singer is located on the same grounds as the Hall but is separated by high fencing. It was constructed to house 48 males and 12 females. Unlike the Hall, there are no cells. The minors are still separated by gender but are housed in a dormitory setting with individual cubicles. Camp Singer has its own classrooms in addition to indoor and outdoor recreational areas. Minors are sentenced to Camp Singer by the Juvenile Court. The average length of stay is three to six months depending on behavior, offense, and other related factors.

The dining hall located between Juvenile Hall and Camp Singer provides three hot meals a day. Menus are routinely reviewed for nutritional content and quality. (See Cal. Code of Regs., Title 15, sec. 1460.) Since the Hall and the Camp have separate mealtimes, the residents do not come in contact with each other.

Upon entering Juvenile Hall, medical, psychological, and educational profiles are performed. Thereafter, the minors at both facilities are offered counseling provided by staff, contract personnel, and volunteers on substance abuse, commitment to change, and values clarification. All minors under the age of 18 must receive 240 minutes of classroom instruction daily. (See Cal. Ed. Code sec. 48645.3 and Cal. Code of Regs., Title 15, sec. 1370.) Those having a high school diploma and choosing not to attend school remain locked down.

Minors in the Camp are encouraged to participate in community projects outside the facility.

Camp Singer and the Juvenile Hall both utilize a point system. Points are used as a medium of exchange to gain privileges. Points are awarded by teachers and staff for positive and desirable behavior.

Method of Investigation

Two weeks prior to a scheduled site visit the Grand Jury interviewed the administrative staff of Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall/Camp Singer. The interview focused on the history, philosophy, operation, objectives, and procedures of both facilities. A review of the Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall and Maxine Singer Youth Guidance Center Policy and Procedures Manual, California Welfare and Institutions Code, and the California Code of Regulations was performed.

Members of the Grand Jury Law Enforcement Committee inspected the Juvenile Hall and Camp Singer on three different occasions. The first visit was a scheduled afternoon tour of both facilities that was led by a senior staff member. The tour included the intake office, general housing units [male and female], secure housing unit, kitchen, classrooms, and the indoor recreation area. During this inspection, grand jurors observed classroom instruction in session.

The second visit, conducted in the evening, was unannounced. During this visit, private interviews with staff and residents were held and a close inspection of the holding cells was

conducted. The second part of this visit focused on Camp Singer. A staff member assigned to Camp Singer led this part of the tour. In addition to revisiting classrooms, indoor recreation area, and housing areas, part of this tour included private interviews with staff and minors.

The third tour by the Grand Jurors was conducted in three parts:

- a. Re-inspection of the general housing area of Juvenile Hall.
- b. Re-interview staff and a senior staff member.
- c. Observation of the dining hall and kitchen when lunch was served.

Grand Jurors toured the Solano County Juvenile Hall in Fairfield and the Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall in Martinez. The purpose was to compare both facilities and operational procedures with Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall.

Facts and Observations

“The Juvenile Hall shall not be in, or connected with, any jail or prison, and shall not be deemed to be, nor treated as, a penal institution. It shall be conducted in all respects as nearly as a home as possible.” (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code sec. 841.)

At first glance, the Juvenile Hall facility and grounds appear to be well maintained and secure. Closer observation reveals dim lighting in the holding cells, making it difficult for residents to read or study. The inner sides of the cell doors are covered with graffiti. Due to age and usage, some cell doors do not operate correctly. Some of the cell walls are painted with various themes that are faded and marred. The day room carpet is stained and worn. There are no covered outdoor recreation areas for the minors to use during bad weather. (Cal. Code of Regs., Title 15, sec. 1371.)

Younger males that are referred to Juvenile Hall are housed in the female unit. In order to provide privacy, staff will cover the windows in the doors of the female minors.

The Security Housing Unit, opened in 2001, is a modern, clean, self-contained single story building with 15 single cells. A single counselor maintains security. In the last twenty-four months no minor has been housed in this unit.

The Camp Singer male housing unit is a clean well-organized dormitory. This type of arrangement helps teach the minors how to interact in a social setting.

The female housing unit is in the older building of Camp Singer. The drinking fountain doesn't work and is dirty. The reading material available in this unit is outdated. There is no area in the unit set aside for quiet study or writing.

The indoor recreation area, two classrooms, woodshop, and laundry at Camp Singer are located in one building. The key feature of this facility is the enclosed sports arena. The arena is large enough to meet the needs of the Camp. The floor of the arena is covered with carpet. The carpet is dirty and not well secured to the floor, allowing for exposed seams to develop. There is no special equipment available on site for cleaning and maintenance of the carpet. The glass basketball backboards are dirty and the protective pads are torn and hanging. Because of the height and construction of the enclosure surrounding the arena, there are many blind spots in the building, which makes security a concern.

The woodshop is located in an open space in the corner of the building. The wood working equipment that was visible appears to be adequate, and all hand tools were locked away. Because of limited storage space in the wood shop, building material on hand is limited and stored in another part of the building. Because the wood working area is open, concern must be given to the noise level and how it affects other activities in the building.

Classrooms in the building have blackboards, bulletin boards, and desks for teachers, counselors, and students. Teachers, learning materials, books, etc. are provided by the Yuba County Office of Education. Students are divided by academic ability and not by age. Because of changing trends in education and the various skill levels of the minors, it is hard to determine if the subject matter and study material are relevant.

Counselors in the classroom are there to help maintain order and at times will assist the minors with their class work. During our visit the students were involved in their studies and well behaved. The teachers related to the students well and were eager to help.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

The name, Severe Habitual Housing Unit/Secure Housing Unit/SHU, is a term traditionally used in adult detention facilities.

Recommendation

Rename the building after a person or idea that encourages a positive life style.

Finding 2

The interior walls of the entire Juvenile Hall are faded and dull. Cell lighting is poor. Cell doors do not close correctly and are covered with graffiti. The carpet in the day room is stained and worn out.

Recommendation

Repaint the interior of the Juvenile Hall. Replace all cell doors, and old carpet. Replace all light bulbs and fixtures to provide sufficient light for reading and studying.

Finding 3

There is no video monitoring system in any outdoor or indoor recreation areas, and the height and construction of the walls surrounding the indoor arena make security questionable.

Recommendation

A video monitoring system should be installed in all indoor and outdoor recreation areas.

Finding 4

For the last two years no one has been confined to the Secure Housing Unit.

Recommendation

Use the Secure Housing Unit as alternative housing while repairing Juvenile Hall.

Finding 5

There is no covered outdoor recreation area at the Juvenile Hall.

Recommendation

Find a solution that allows minors in Juvenile Hall to exercise outdoors in bad weather.

Finding 6

Counselors are assigned to classrooms to maintain behavior while classes are in session, however, at times they help with instruction.

Recommendation

The Yuba County Office of Education should assure adequate provision of teacher's aides to help with instruction.

Finding 7

The location of the woodshop limits expansion and storage availability for materials.

Recommendation

This area should be expanded or relocated in order to maximize its full vocational and educational benefits.

Finding 8

The indoor carpet in the Camp Singer recreation area is dirty and has unsecured seams. The glass basketball backboards are dirty and the protection pads are not secured.

Recommendation

Consider having the arena carpet cleaned professionally and inspected for damage annually. Clean the glass backboards and reattach protective pads.

Finding 9

Minors who have graduated from high school and elect not to attend school are locked down.

Recommendation

Assign duties within the facility that would keep these minors productively occupied and out of their cells during school periods.

Finding 10

There is no criminal background check on volunteers and contract personnel having contact with the minors during counseling sessions.

Recommendation

All volunteers and contract personnel having contact with minors of Yuba-Sutter Juvenile Hall and Maxine Singer Youth Guidance Center must have a criminal background check completed before counseling minors. (Cal. Code of Regs., Title 15, sec. 1320c.)

PASSED and ADOPTED by the Yuba County Grand Jury on the 17th day of April 2007.

Response Required

Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to both the findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Grand Jury Presiding Judge of the Yuba County Superior Court (The Hon. Debra L. Givens) within 90 days from:

Yuba County Probation Department

California Penal Code

Part 2 of Criminal Procedure

Title 4. Grand Jury Proceedings

Chapter 3. Powers and Duties of Grand Jury

Article 2. Investigation of County, City, and District Affairs

§ 933. Finds and recommendations; copies of final report; comment of governing bodies, elective officers, or agency heads; definition

(a) Each grand jury shall submit to the presiding judge of the superior court a final report of its findings and recommendations that pertain to county government matters during the fiscal or calendar year. Final reports on any appropriate subject may be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court at any time during the term of service of a grand jury. A final report may be submitted for comment to responsible officers, agencies, or departments, including the county board of supervisors, when applicable, upon finding of the presiding judge that the report is in compliance with this title. For 45 days after the end of the term, the foreperson and his or her designees shall, upon reasonable notice, be available to clarify the recommendations of the report.

(b) One copy of each final report, together with the responses thereto, found to be in compliance with this title shall be placed on file with the clerk of the court and remain on file in the office of the clerk. The clerk shall immediately forward a true copy of the report and the responses to the State Archivist who shall retain that report and all responses in perpetuity.

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

(d) As used in this section "agency" includes a department.

§933.05. Responses to findings

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

(2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.