

Santa Barbara County Detention Facilities Get Grand Jury Seal of Approval

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(Giana Magnoli / Noozhawk file photo)

Demographics at the Santa Barbara County Jail continue to evolve. More than 80 percent of inmates are pre-trial suspects and nearly 80 percent are felony suspects — both big increases from 10 years ago.

Despite fewer resources and more inmates, new report credits Sheriff's Department advances Santa Barbara County's detention facilities are getting by with fewer resources but the [county Grand Jury](#) reported that facilities are still well-managed.

The overcrowding in all [Sheriff's Department](#) facilities wasn't examined with great detail as in years past, but it's still a problem, according to a report the Grand Jury released last week. [Click here for a copy of the Grand Jury's report.](#)

The county's attempt to pay for its share of a new Santa Maria jail through [a half-cent sales tax was shot down by voters last November](#). It's unclear if the county will be able to come up with the money needed to receive \$56 million in state matching funds. Since the failure of Measure S, there hasn't been any formal discussion of alternatives.

A [2005 New Jail Planning Study](#) catalogued funding alternatives and found most of them lacking for a project of this magnitude. Among the ideas dismissed, primarily because they wouldn't cover ongoing operating costs or couldn't be implemented quickly enough, were pay-as-you-go, a savings account, general obligation bonds, certificates of participation, sale of county property and oil development. The last option — a sales tax — was called “the most viable and timely option.”

The [Main Jail](#), 4436 Calle Real, has released 18,000 inmates early since 1999 because of overcrowding, [Sheriff Bill Brown told the Santa Barbara City Council](#) last year. A thousand of those early releases were rearrested in the time they should have still been in custody, he said.

The inmate population has changed over the years, too. Currently, 81 percent of the inmates are pre-trial suspects and 78 percent are felony suspects — both large increases from 2000. It costs about \$26,000 to house an inmate for a year.

[Sheriff's Department facilities](#) include the Main Jail, the [Medium Security Facility](#), the [Santa Maria Branch Jail](#) and small holding stations throughout the county.

Recidivism rates are around 70 percent — meaning 70 percent of inmates will commit new crimes — but the [Sheriff's Treatment Program for drug and alcohol abuse](#) has cut that in half for its graduates. For 12 years, Supervisor Chuck McClain has overseen the counseling, programming and separate housing blocks for the men and women who either volunteer or are court-mandated to participate in the program.

Grand Jury reports from the past few years call the [Probation Department's](#) juvenile facilities the most praiseworthy, especially [Los Prietos Boys Camp & Academy](#). The condition and management is “superior,” the Grand Jury noted, and the increasing number of high school diplomas given out to the camp's [Los Robles High School](#) students is admirable.

Boys sent to the camp off Paradise Road are serving four- to six-month sentences and follow a demanding schedule of class, vocational training, work, meals, exercise, community service and counseling from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The high school is operated by the [county Education Office](#) and is located within the camp's fences.

Most of the boys are at least a year behind on school credits and graduation rates have risen to a steady 20 per year from about four, in part because more computers are available for the students, Fred Razo, juvenile court and community schools administrator for the county Education Office, has told [Noozhawk](#).

The Probation Department also manages Santa Barbara's Juvenile Hall, which is now used for booking and holding people for court appearances, and the Susan J Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center in Santa Maria.

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