

## DETENTION FACILITIES IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

### 2023-24 Grand Jury Inspections

#### SUMMARY

Under California Penal Code Section 919, subdivision (b), the Civil Grand Jury is required to “inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” The 2023-24 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury visited all the detention facilities in the County. This report contains results of physical inspections of jails and detention facilities within Santa Barbara County which have the capability of detaining individuals who have allegedly violated the law. The Grand Jury also inspected the Coroner’s Bureau facility.

The facilities visited are identified below by their respective jurisdictions:

#### Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office

- Santa Barbara Sheriff/Coroner’s Bureau
- Isla Vista Foot Patrol Substation - **holding cell closed**
- Lompoc Sheriff’s Substation
- Lompoc Holding Facility
- New Cuyama Substation/Holding Facility - **new holding facility**
- Santa Barbara Court Holding Facility
- Main Jail
- Northern Branch Jail
- Santa Maria Court Holding Facility
- Santa Maria Substation - **holding cell closed**
- Solvang Substation - **holding cell closed**

#### Santa Barbara County Probation Department

- Los Prietos Boys Camp - **closed**
- Susan J. Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center

#### Municipal Police Jails and Holding Facilities

- Lompoc Police Department
- Santa Maria Police Department

- Santa Barbara Police Department
- Guadalupe “Secure Bench” - **closed**

## **METHODOLOGY**

The facilities listed above were visited by the 2023-2024 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) one or more times. Teams comprised of not fewer than two jurors conducted these inspections. Law enforcement and staff members who were on duty were interviewed. As applicable, inquiries were made with custody staff members relevant to detainee operations, the conditions of the facility, and staff professionalism. A standard checklist was utilized as a guideline while conducting these inspections and interviews.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The following facility reports are in the same order as listed above:

### **Santa Barbara Sheriff/Coroner’s Bureau**

A separate investigation was conducted regarding the Coroner’s Bureau facility. That report has been issued and can be found here: [Santa Barbara County Coroner Facility and Equipment](#)

### **Isla Vista Foot Patrol Substation - holding cell closed**

#### **Lompoc Sheriff’s Substation**

The holding cell at this location is a small interview room located just inside the building entrance from the secured parking area. The room is used by deputies to interview subjects who have been detained or to interview subjects who have reported to the substation at the request of law enforcement. A detainee is seldom in the room for more than 30 minutes and is always in the company of a deputy. When a detainee is arrested subsequent to being interviewed, the detainee is either immediately cited and released or transported to the Northern Branch Jail (NBJ) for booking and incarceration.

### **Lompoc Court Holding Facility**

The court holding facility serves a single Superior Court Department with a criminal calendar. The facility is used only two days per week, all day on Wednesday and one-half day on Thursday. Incarcerated persons are transported to the facility by bus from the NBJ arriving between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. Between 23 and 37 incarcerated persons are processed each day. Incarcerated persons are at the facility no more than seven hours on Wednesday and no more than four hours on Thursday. Incarcerated persons who have completed their court proceedings are returned to jail. No more than 10 incarcerated persons remain at the court at the end of the day. These incarcerated persons are transported back to the NBJ by bus.

The court holding facility is staffed by two or three deputies who accompany incarcerated persons to the facility on the bus. Additionally, an on-site Deputy Sheriff reports directly to the holding cells before incarcerated persons arrive and leaves when the last inmate has left the facility.

The facility has an observation office with multiple cameras recording all activity in the hallways, offices, and cell areas within the facility. The cameras also cover the bus sally port, and all entrances and exits from the facility. The observation office is continually staffed when incarcerated persons are present.

### **Cuyama Sheriff Substation/Holding Cell - new**

The Cuyama Sheriff's Substation/Holding Facility is located in New Cuyama. The population of Cuyama at the time of this inspection is less than 600. The on-site deputies provide law enforcement for the Cuyama Valley, which includes numerous remote farms, schools, businesses, and homes. The substation has two full-time deputies who rotate shifts and receive support when needed from the California Highway Patrol or deputies from Santa Maria. In addition, the Sheriff deputies in residence in Cuyama will assist other law enforcement agencies as well as Fire and Rescue Services. This substation and holding facility share the same building with Santa Barbara County Fire.

The new facility was completed in June 2023. It has a main office with communication equipment, files, and computers. Additionally, there is a separate conference room with teleconferencing capabilities. The deputies also have a small kitchen area, a shower, and an armory. All areas of the facility appear to be well-kept with plenty of space.

The holding cell, which is adjacent to the main office area, is currently not used for holding suspects because it has not received final state approval. The holding cell door opens into the cell rather than outward. This format is counter to the accepted standards for holding detainees. The interior of the cell includes an approximate 15” wide by 60” long concrete bench and a stainless-steel ensemble of toilet and basin (see photo below). If an arrest is made by the deputies, they either hold the suspect in their patrol vehicle or drive them immediately to the NBJ for booking. No suspects are kept overnight at this substation.



*New Cuyama Holding Cell*

## **Santa Barbara Court Holding Facility**

The Superior Court Figueroa Building was constructed in 1954 and underwent renovation in 1990 and again in 2006. The Court Holding facility occupies the basement of the Superior Court building. The number of incarcerated persons held during any given weekday is no more than 42. The day the Jury visited, 33 incarcerated persons were or had been in holding cells awaiting their court appearance. No incarcerated persons are ever held there overnight. They are only detained there for their court appearance, and then as soon as possible they are returned to either the Main Jail or NBJ.

The Jury entered the holding location on the driveway to the east side of the Superior Court Figueroa building. The entrance leads into the basement of the building, and the driveway adjacent to the entrance serves as the most direct point of entry and exit for incarcerated persons. The entry structure is a painted metal enclosure (sally port). Even though there is a drainage system in the sally port as well as the corridor, during a severe rainstorm this year the sally port and the corridor were flooded. The drains were subsequently cleaned out.

Along the length of the entry corridor are nine sturdy single person cells that are now only used if there is an overflow of incarcerated persons or if certain incarcerated persons must be held separately from the others. The cells are about 7 feet tall by 32 inches square and are equipped with a very small, attached metal corner seat.

To the left of the single cells, there are holding cells of different sizes, some hold one inmate, some two or three. There are larger cells that hold up to 12 incarcerated persons. At the end of the corridor is the operational center. The hallway continued down a very narrow passageway where there are more holding cells.

The operation/observation center is located at the corner of the two hallways. There is an area outside the center where deputies can sit while they wait to escort incarcerated persons. The center is a cramped room with an alcove where the cell videos are monitored. Files, desks, and counters take up a good deal of the limited space.

Although it serves its purpose, the general condition of the Superior Court holding area is outdated, small, and crowded. Furthermore, the air in the basement was warm and muggy. The staff is, to some extent, inured to the air quality condition although there have been some maintenance repairs to correct the problem. But not enough has been done due to old equipment and outdated structural systems.

There needs to be a major overhaul of the facility, preferably an expansion in every aspect of the operation. Everything needs to be upgraded. But first and foremost, the air circulation must be improved. The State of California has budgeted for a new facility, which is currently earmarked to be initiated in fiscal year 2026-27.

### **Main Jail**

With the opening of the NBJ, there are now only three areas currently in use at the Main Jail. The original section of the Main Jail was opened in 1971; the Northwest Wing was built in 1987-88; the Inmate Reception Center (IRC) was added in 1992. There are three types of populations: general, protected, and restricted.

Prior to the opening of the NBJ, the Main Jail was often cited for overcrowding. Floor sleeping was common. It was rated for 819 incarcerated persons and often the population exceeded that. Now there are half that number of incarcerated persons at the Main Jail. With over 200 incarcerated persons transferred to the NBJ, this has allowed the closure of several wings at the Main Jail.

There are two safety cells in use in the main area. Each safety cell is a cement box lined with impact absorbing material. There is a hole in the floor instead of a toilet, and there is no water available. The safety cells are for those who are actively combative or suicidal. The incarcerated persons inside are checked every 15 minutes. Their stay is normally scheduled for 12 hours maximum. There are also two holding cells for medical or mental health incarcerated persons. These have a concrete bed, toilet, and mirror. The staff makes rounds every 15 minutes and maintains an observation log based on what is seen through the glass window in the door.

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) dormitory had 17 incarcerated persons on the day of the Jury's inspection. This room is a large space filled with beds and a few tables with benches. There was one wall of opaque glass for natural light. The bathrooms have recently been remodeled to accommodate incarcerated persons with disabilities.

The older group cells in the Main Jail have a compact front space filled with tables and benches, plus a TV. Sleeping bunks occupy a back room.

There are four housing units in the Northwest module. These units previously separated different gang members. They are now used for behavioral health incarcerated persons and inmate workers. A deputy is assigned to each Behavioral Health Unit (BHU).

The BHUs have been remodeled. They are considered step-up units compared to the former restrictive single cell units. These units have cells on two floors and a central day room. Depending on their level of behavior, the number of incarcerated persons allowed in the central dayroom may vary. This area has tables and benches, a rug, couches, a TV, and a phone. Incarcerated persons tend to respond better when in these units with more open space.

Incarcerated persons with behavioral health issues are housed in one unit and are considered incompetent to stand trial (IST). They take a class for jail-based competency to stand trial. Usually these individuals stay for six (6) months to be restored to competency so that they can participate in the court process; this used to take years. Before this program, they were in restrictive housing, which is harsher and less conducive to developing competency. This jail program restored 130 people last year.

The daily per capita cost for an inmate is \$344 at the Main Jail and \$280 at the NBJ. Based on the design of the NBJ, a lower number of custody officers is required.

The three housing areas of the Main Jail should be staffed by a minimum of 19 custody officers. Because of staff shortages, there are generally 10-14 officers working. They are scheduled for 12-

hour shifts and mandatory overtime is common. The overtime requirement is cited as the major reason custody officers stop working at the Santa Barbara County jails, Main and NBJ.

Because of the high cost of living in Santa Barbara County, most custody officers assigned to the Main Jail live in other parts of the County and even out of the County. Some custody officers who have a long commute use the former Medium Security Facility, on the Main Jail campus, to sleep between shifts. This part of the jail, which once held about 200 incarcerated persons, has been closed and is no longer used.

Cameras throughout the jail are being upgraded. They will offer a wider and clearer view of the residential areas. Monitoring the cameras will be consolidated in one room with two officers for greater efficiency.

Other infrastructure systems can be harder to renovate. The Northwest and the IRC wings have their own heating system; the original Main Jail has an older system that is harder to regulate. The jail's remedy has been to issue sweaters to incarcerated persons.

There are several outside areas. In the general population area, one large outdoor yard can hold up to 25 incarcerated persons at one time. The incarcerated persons must be escorted there, different groups at a time. The Jail is in the process of purchasing more correctional-grade recreation equipment. The other housing units in the Northwest branch have smaller open areas. All the outdoor yards are concrete with meshing over the top.

Besides the TV and the scheduled time in the outside yard, all incarcerated persons are issued an Android tablet to help occupy their time. The incarcerated persons are able to access emails, photos, legal research, music, games, and programs on the tablets.

Santa Barbara City College classes are available. The jail now has a full-time person who works with the community programs. By participating in these programs, the incarcerated persons will earn milestone credits toward release.



There are six Wellpath nurses' offices in the building. While the nursing positions are fully staffed at the moment, it is not always easy to get incarcerated persons to medical appointments because a custody officer must accompany the inmate to the office. This takes an officer away from other duties. Visits from family, friends, and lawyers also demand that a custody officer accompany the inmate to the visitation booths.

The jail is working on additional safety measures for the incarcerated persons. They have begun removing structural elements that could aid suicide attempts. This includes any prominent feature that could be used in hangings. Since a recent suicide by jumping from the second story of a housing unit, there have been discussions for the installation of mesh or some sort of fall protection.

Meals are prepared on site. There is a dietician to assist with special requirements and restrictions. All incarcerated persons are provided basic necessities. There is also a commissary, from which incarcerated persons can get a variety of food items, including coffee. Incarcerated persons can use a type of personal payment system to obtain more items from the commissary. This can be viewed as a reward by the incarcerated persons.

Although there have been modifications to the Main Jail, the future of the facility remains static. When asked if the building can be remodeled, answers from administration and custody staff have stated that for this building there is no current plan or funding to make this happen. In the meantime, staff continue to make any possible improvements.

### **Northern Branch Jail**

The Santa Barbara County Northern Branch Jail (NBJ) is a Type II facility (typically referred to as County Jails) and has a Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) rating of 344 beds and an operating capacity of 376 beds. At the time of the inspection, the jail had a population of 300 male and 40 female incarcerated individuals.

The NBJ was opened for occupancy in January of 2022. This well-designed facility is a model for new jail construction. It sits on over 50 acres and includes housing for incarcerated persons, administrative offices, and medical and mental health beds in a specialized and well-equipped unit.

The jail is comprised of interconnected housing pods with small outdoor recreation yards. This correctional facility was designed as a predominantly direct-supervision facility. Custody Deputies supervise incarcerated persons while working within the housing unit twenty-four hours a day. Additionally, centralized electronic monitoring stations are staffed by custody deputies and sheriff's service technicians.

Incarcerated persons may access classrooms for continued education, behavioral counseling, or yoga instruction. There is an on-site warehouse and a central plant for maintenance, including painting and groundskeeping. An outdoor area is also designated for occupational training facilities. There is a fully functioning, professional-style kitchen where volunteer incarcerated persons help prepare meals. A laundry facility, also staffed by volunteer incarcerated persons, cleans jail clothing and bedding.

Medical, dental, and psychological care is administered by Wellpath, a contracted provider. The Jail has an area designated for restrictive housing and two Behavioral Health Units, one serving males and one serving females.

This Jury found the NBJ to be clean, bright, and quiet with a well-maintained physical plant. The staff was professional and engaging to the Jury members and to those who were incarcerated. While the NBJ faces chronic short staffing, the Jury recognizes this as emblematic of the crisis in law enforcement staffing across the nation. It should be noted that the administration at the Northern Branch Jail, in conjunction with the Sheriff's Human Resources Bureau, works diligently to attract qualified custody deputies.

### **Santa Maria Court Holding Facility**

The Santa Maria Court Compound (SMCC) has 12 holding cells. Each cell can accommodate 4-28 incarcerated persons. The facility capacity is 113. The staff is comprised of 50 officers who work 10-hour shifts. The incarcerated persons are held as long as court/trial is in session.

The facility has not exceeded capacity since its last inspection. There have been no suicides, no attempted suicides, no deaths from other causes, nor have there been any escapes since last inspected.

There is no medical team on staff. If there is a medical emergency, American Medical Response (AMR) is called immediately. The staff is well aware of the medical conditions of the incarcerated persons, including any allergies. Cold meals are prepared including special diets and packed by NBJ staff daily. The meals are transported to the compound for the incarcerated persons and refrigerated in the small, clean kitchen area.

The facility is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. In case of fire or other emergency there is an escape route/plan in place. The control room is located in the middle of the holding cells with multiple cameras present and well-staffed.

#### **Santa Maria Substation- holding cell closed**

#### **Solvang Substation – holding cell closed**

#### **Los Prietos Boys Camp - closed**

#### **Susan J. Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center, Santa Maria**

The Juvenile Justice Center (JJC) is managed by the Santa Barbara County Probation Department and is the only 24-hour maximum security facility for juvenile offenders in Santa Barbara County. The JJC is adjacent to the Juvenile Court building, making it efficient for the youth to attend court. Juveniles (aka “wards”) housed at the JJC include both males and females. They are directed to the facility from the juvenile justice system and may be serving a sentence or awaiting transportation to placement.

The JJC has a total capacity of 120. At the time of the Jury’s inspection, the population included 34 males and three (3) females. Of these incarcerated youths, six (6) were considered “high risk.” The number of wards has been declining because of changes in California State laws. Fewer youths

are sentenced to incarceration but instead may be part of the home detention program alternatives. These alternatives include but are not limited to electronic monitoring, house arrest, or home supervision.

The JJC offers incarcerated juveniles many services. Juveniles who have not earned a high school diploma must attend classes while in the JJC. College credits can be earned through local junior college courses available in the facility's classroom setting. All juveniles are medically cared for and undergo a Behavioral Wellness Health screening. Substance abuse rehabilitation is offered through the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (CADA) program. Counseling and support are offered to wards who may have suffered sexual exploitation. All wards are offered coaching through Courage to Change. This is a program designed to help offenders recognize areas that present risk and how to make better choices for long-term success.

The staff administers an effective performance program based on rewards for good behavior. The establishment of the Trust Unit gives wards an opportunity to be housed in a more relaxed environment with more daily choices. Housing in the Trust Unit is dependent upon ongoing good behavior. Both physical and mental health care continue throughout their stay.

The onsite mental health staff consists of licensed professionals provided by Wellpath. These professionals describe their team as cohesive, long-term, and committed to helping the population they serve. A mental health care professional is available Monday through Friday and holidays from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. This staff deals in crisis management, ongoing mental health support, and "warm hand-off" care for those who are being released.

Surveillance cameras are placed throughout the JJC, although they do not face the cells. A staff member watches the videos from the central monitoring room.

The outdoor exercise facilities are available and are being developed. At the time of the Grand Jury visit the large open yard was being updated.

There are limited recidivism statistics due to the confidential nature of juvenile files and information. Evidence of the effectiveness of the JJC in reducing recidivism is lacking because juvenile records are sealed after the probation period terminates.

One area of concern for the Jury was food services. The current contract with a food catering service seems to be universally disliked by all the residents. It not only provides less food than adolescents need and want but also the food is sometimes found to be unpalatable to adolescent tastebuds. Staff reports that it is difficult to find companies willing to bid on the food contracts because of the 7 days a week / 52 weeks a year meal requirement the facility must meet. There are no commercial kitchen facilities available in the building, so in-house preparation is not an option.

Overall, the Grand Jury found the JJC clean and well-maintained. Those currently in charge of the facility work to not only meet but surpass California state operational requirements. The staff was extremely courteous and professional and demonstrated a high level of dedication toward the juveniles.

### **Lompoc Police Department**

The facility has seven cells in total. Three general population male cells hold four incarcerated persons each for a total of 12; one general population female cell holds four, one protective custody cell can hold three (but usually is limited to one), one male sobering cell holds four, and one female sobering cell holds four. There are seven total cells with a maximum capacity of 27. It is staffed by the Jail Supervisor and three sworn jail employees. The control center, which has cameras covering the entire facility, is staffed whenever incarcerated persons are present. The Jury felt that the facility was old but adequate, well-maintained, and staffed appropriately.

### **Santa Maria Police Department**

The facility is utilized for the initial processing of detainees and interviewing prior to the subject being cited and released or transported to the NBJ. Subjects are under the supervision of a Police Officer at all times. A video observation office observes and records activity in the area at all times. Ordinarily, subjects are in the facility for no more than thirty minutes.

### **Santa Barbara Police Department Holding Cell**

The Santa Barbara Police has two holding cells in its facility. The cells appear to be in good condition, and the area adjacent to the cells is organized and clean. Directly across the hall from the holding cell room is an interrogation room.

No one is ever left in the cells overnight. Most arrestees are taken directly to the Main Jail for immediate booking. The only exception for holding an arrestee at the Santa Barbara Police Department would be when a capital crime has occurred that would necessitate immediate interrogations requiring the arrested individual to remain at the Police Department for an extended period.

The Police Department building on East Figueroa constructed in 1959 is outdated and in need of many infrastructure upgrades. In 2022, the decision was finalized to build a new Police Department Structure at the corner of Cota and Santa Barbara Streets. The new three-story, 65,000 square-foot headquarters with 236 parking spaces is estimated to cost approximately \$95 million and is projected to be completed in 2026.



*A rendering of the proposed new Santa Barbara police station at the corner of Santa Barbara and Cota streets downtown. (Courtesy Rendering / Cearnal Collective)*

### **Guadalupe Police Department “Secured Bench”**

The Secured Bench is no longer being used. Both adults and juveniles are now held at the Guadalupe Police Department for 45 minutes or less. The adults are cited and released or transferred to NBJ. The juveniles are cited and then immediately released to their parents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2023-2024 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury would like to express its appreciation to the law enforcement officers and support personnel who helped facilitate the inspections. The jail and holding facilities within Santa Barbara County are staffed by professional and dedicated personnel. The findings and recommendations mostly stem from a lack of funding to upgrade outdated or poorly constructed buildings.

The Northern Branch Jail has been operating since 2022. This jail has allowed several holding facilities in Santa Barbara County to no longer be used.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Finding 1:** The new Cuyama Sheriff’s Substation / Holding Facility cell is unable to get certified due to an incorrect installation of the cell door.

**Recommendation 1:** The Sheriff’s Office should request the repair of the cell door so it will meet the certification standard.

**Finding 2:** The Santa Barbara Superior Court Figueroa Building holding facility’s metal cells in the entrance hallway are used only when overflow conditions require it.

**Recommendation 2:** The Sheriff’s Office should remove the metal cells.

**Finding 3:** The Santa Barbara Superior Court Figueroa Building holding facility’s air quality in the basement facility is poor.

**Recommendation 3:** The Sheriff’s Office should request a complete overhaul of the air circulation system in the basement facility.

**Elected Official: Santa Barbara County Sheriff - 60 Days**

**Findings:** 1, 2, 3

**Recommendations:** 1, 2, 3

**Requirements for Responses:**

Pursuant to California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the Findings and Recommendations within the specified statutory time limit.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- Agree
- Disagree with an explanation
- Disagree partially with an explanation

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken
- Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule
- Requires further analysis, with an analysis completion date of fewer than 6 months after the issuance of the report
- It will not be implemented with an explanation of why