



San Diego County Probation Department

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Cesar Escuro, Interim Chief Probation Officer

April 21, 2021

Yvette Klepin
Juvenile Justice Commission Chair
2901 Meadow Lark Drive
San Diego, CA 92123

Response to the 2020 Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) Facility Inspection Report for East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility

Dear Ms. Klepin:

We are in receipt of the Juvenile Justice Commission 2020 Facility Inspection Report for East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility. Below, please find the San Diego County Probation Department responses to the JJC Recommendations as it pertains to East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility.

Recommendation a:

The Juvenile Justice Commission strongly encourages and recommends the Probation Department review, evaluate, and implement changes to OC use and de-escalation tactic practices to ensure the safety of youth and staff.

Response a:

The Probation Department is committed to developing a positive youth development culture where violence is minimal, and staff do not feel the need to carry OC spray for their own safety. The Probation Department is training all direct care staff in the areas of Adolescent Brain Development, Trauma-Informed Care, Implicit Bias, and Restorative Practices. It is anticipated that this will improve communication and rapport between staff and youth and result in a reduction of serious incidents and the use force including OC spray. The Department remains committed to fully implementing the Mandt System in Fiscal Year 2021-22.

Recommendation b:

The Commission recommends the Probation Department review incident reports collectively in order to ascertain who is using OC spray and when it is being used to assist in decision making to ensure youth safety.

Response b:

When OC spray is used, it is always documented in the form of a written incident report. From these reports we are able to collect data on the frequency, amount and which specific officers are using this type of force. This data is regularly reviewed at a department executive level and at the facility management level. San Diego County Probation Department has partnered with national experts from the Council of Juvenile Justice of Administrators (CJJA) to review and improve our de-escalation and use of force practices to ensure they are within national best practices.

Each facility also has a use of force review committee that meets monthly to review all use of force cases from the preceding month, to include all uses of OC. This review committee renders a single finding to determine if the force used was within policy and will provide recommendations for areas of additional training, changes in policy, or if further administrative investigation is needed. Additionally, the facility compiles specific data on all OC spray use and the staff deploying OC. As the department evaluates the first data collection period under our new contract with Performance Based Standards, additional data system upgrades will be requested in order to more effectively identify trends.

Recommendation c:

The Commission recommends the Probation Department develop a robust training in the area of Implicit Bias, Adolescent Brain Development, Trauma Informed Care, and Restorative Justice for all staff (Probation and Collaborative) working with youth in the facility.

Response c:

The Probation Department is collaborating with San Diego State University to provide training to staff in the areas of: Adolescent Brain Development, Trauma-Informed Care, Implicit Bias, and Restorative Practices, while continuing to explore opportunities to enhance and expand training opportunities for staff in Juvenile Institutions CORE training. These classroom trainings began in February 2020 but were impacted by COVID-19 before transitioning to virtual learning. All current staff in the Institutions will receive these trainings by June 30, 2021.

Recommendation d:

The Commission recommends additional training for staff on building rapport with youth in order to reduce the use of force and OC spray.

Response d:

The Probation Department is training all direct care staff in the areas of Adolescent Brain Development, Trauma-Informed Care, Implicit Bias, and Restorative Practices. As previously highlighted, Probation will be implementing the nationally recognized Mandt System to all Institutional Services Officers in Fiscal Year 2021-22. The Mandt will be incorporated into future J.I. Core Academies and there's an annual refresher component to avoid knowledge loss. The Mandt is built on a foundation of safety being in relationships. Unlike other trainings, Mandt also empowers staff with progressive interventions to de-escalate a potentially violent situations and teaches staff how to safely go "hands on", as a last resort, to protect the safety and well-being of other youth and staff.

Recommendation e:

The Commission recommends the Juvenile Court and Community Schools administer intellectually appropriate education for all youth so they are working at the appropriate grade level.

Response e:

The San Diego County Office of Education responds: All JCCS core courses are A-G approved, and we only use CA State Standards approved curriculum. Early in the last year of Distance Learning, we had to use some supplemental materials in our learning packets to accommodate the extraordinary circumstances. As we transitioned to Google Classroom, we reverted to our Board approved curriculum that is at grade level. Now that we are back to In-person Learning, students are placed in appropriate courses according to their grade level.

Recommendation f:

The Commission recommends Probation and Juvenile Court and Community Schools expand on-line college opportunities for youth that have completed high school.

Response f:

We continue to expand our college opportunities for our high school graduates by enrolling them in courses of their interest. In the last year, it was difficult to offer a large variety of courses due to pandemic. The school had to transition to distance learning which only allowed our certificated and classified staff to telecommute (work from home). With all the obstacles, we were able to collaborate with partners in probation and continue to offer college classes to all our students with 30% of our students participating.

Recommendation g:

The Commission recommends additional CTE courses and arts and music programming to engage the youth and provide them relevant experience.

Response g:

East Mesa will continue to build our CTE programming this spring and this summer. Due to the pandemic and loss of staffing, we had to pause CTE programming in March of 2020. Now that we are back to in-person learning, we can begin to rebuild our CTE programs by hiring staff and working with our partners in probation to roll out CTE programming that is safe and high interest for students.

Bringing the Arts and Music to East Mesa continues to be a priority. In the last year, students were offered the following Art programs. David's Harp Music Production, Studio in Art (Traditional Art Class), Guitar/Ukulele Lessons, Music Appreciation (Elective), and Percussion and Drum Circle Program. We will continue to add more programming this spring and summer.

Recommendation h:

The Commission recommends additional snacks be provided for the youth throughout the day in addition to healthier food options.

Response h:

All housing units have fruit baskets that offer a variety of fresh fruits to youth daily. These additional snacks are available to the youth to eat throughout the day and are approved within the Title 15 caloric intake range by the nutritionist.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Juvenile Justice Commission 2020 Facility Inspection Report for East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility.

Very respectfully,



CESAR ESCURO
Interim Chief Probation Officer

CE/ms

cc: Ruben Leyva, Assistant Chief Probation Officer
Scott Huizar, Executive Deputy Chief, Youth Development and Community Support Services
Alejandro Zermeno, Deputy Chief, Institutional Services
Noel Susi, Division Chief, East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility