



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 Urban Camp

Dear Ms. Klepin:

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

Recommendation a:

Continue efforts to keep the numbers of incarcerated youth low.
The number of incarcerated youth in all San Diego juvenile institutions is down. The average daily population at Urban Camp for 2019 was 79 (63 boys and 16 girls). This represents a 19% drop in average daily population compared with the four previous years of average daily population at Camp Barrett and GRF combined. Certainly COVID is a factor, but at a recent JJC quarterly meeting, Deputy Chief Zermeño raised the issue of Probation and its government partners addressing the issue of how many youths really need to be incarcerated. To the extent that this issue is within Probation's jurisdiction, Probation should continue efforts to keep the numbers of incarcerated youth low and make full use of outside community programs.

Response a:

The Probation Department agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation b:

Provide programming as soon as feasible (taking into account COVID limitations, and modify programming to better accommodate the length of stay of the youth.
During the inspection, the programming services provider (Bridgeways) indicated that not enough programming was being provided for the youth and that the programs were often longer than the average stay of the youth at Urban Camp so that the youth could not complete the programming or get credit for it. Urban Camp is a short-term facility with the average length of stay is approximately 45 days. In light of this fact, the Commission recommends that sufficient programming be provided for the youth (once COVID is no longer a factor) and that the programming be modified to fit the length of stay of the youth so that they can complete the programming, where possible.

Response b:

The Probation Department agrees with this recommendation. Services should be provided that match youth needs. If youth are released prior to services being completed, Probation uses reentry and case management to attempt linking youth in the community.

Recommendation c:

Expand the use of mentors and track their effectiveness over time.

Mentors are increasingly recognized as a key part of a youth's success in their communities after incarceration. While Probation's mentor programs in North County and Central San Diego were discontinued due to COVID, we recommend that every effort be made to continue these programs over Zoom as soon as possible. We also recommend that Probation gather data on the effectiveness of its mentor programs in terms of a youth's success in their community after incarceration and whether they had a mentor before incarceration or began being mentored while incarcerated. The assumption should be that all incarcerated youth have a community mentor as a way of providing encouragement and community continuity outside a law enforcement setting.

Response c:

The Probation Department is working toward enhancing the number of mentors for our youth and partnering with mentors with lived experience will continue to be at the core of the program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, mentors have been meeting with their clients in public, through "virtual classes" and a hybrid program which includes virtual and in person meetings. Although mentor visitation of youth in custody was slowed by the pandemic, we expect that once in-person contact visitation resumes, mentor service will continue to be broadened. The Probation Department will coordinate its contract oversight and research approach with SANDAG to support data collection and program evaluation.

Recommendation d:

Improve the "warm hand off" for mental health services for youth leaving the facility.

During the inspection, we learned that there is no longitudinal tracking of youth in terms of whether they continue to receive mental health (or physical health) services after they leave the institution. They are given referral information but there is no tracking of whether the referrals are followed up. Clearly, this could be an area where a mentor might help, as the current "warm hand off" system doesn't appear to have a high rate of success. Probation and its partners should increase their tracking and accountability measures to ensure that needed services are continued as seamlessly as possible from the institution to the community for each youth in terms of the provision of mental health services, medications and physical health needs, if relevant.

Response d:

The mentors described above will be an important element in the warm hand-off as youth re-enter the community. The Probation Department has also been working to better develop a team concept that maintains the case carrying probation officer's engagement during the youth's time in the program in order to smooth their transition back to the community, prevent any gaps in service and maintain the youth within a client-centered continuum of services throughout their time on supervision. Additionally, Behavioral Health Services has a process in place whereby each youth's clinician makes follow-up calls to the youth to check on their well-being, to ensure the youth/family is following-up with community-based services and referrals, and to provide assistance/encouragement if the youth is not following-up with services. The Probation Department will also address this priority as part of oversight of the medical services contract.

Recommendation e:

Consider eliminating “kicks.”

Awarding “kicks,” or a reduction in sentence for good behavior, sounds like a holdover from the prison model, along with crossed arms while walking and sitting for a room count. If awarding “kicks” is recognized as appropriate by the Youth in Custody practice model, perhaps this “reward” could be reframed to move it away from prison culture. If “kicks” are not in conformance with the YIC practice model, consider using behavior rewards that are in line with the practice model.

Response e:

The Probation Department agrees with this recommendation. Correctional or prison practices, when employed in a youth facility, do not align with national best practices. Probation believes youth should only be in custody for the length of time necessary to receive rehabilitative services and not present a risk to community safety. The department has transitioned to a positive behavior management system, based on youth achievements, to support daily behavior. The department will look for ways to incorporate this structure, which was supported by the Youth in Custody Practice Model, to replace the practice of “kicks.”

Recommendation f:

Set a deadline for ending the use of pepper spray.

The Commission has recommended for the past decade that Probation reduce and plan to eliminate its use of pepper spray as a conflict resolution tool in its juvenile institutions. Now is the time to set a deadline for the elimination of pepper spray in its institutions. While the number of incidents is down, this is likely due to reduced numbers of youth (and therefore increased staffing ratios) in the institutions. We also recognize that Probation was hoping to use Mandt training (workplace violence reduction training) at San Diego State University as a way to reduce its use of pepper spray, but suspended that training due to COVID. However, there is comprehensive online Mandt training available as shown on their website (www.mandtsystem.com) so perhaps Probation could switch to online training. In addition, the Commission recommends that Probation maintain staffing levels in order to reduce the number of pepper spray incidents, and that Probation monitor both the situations where pepper spray is used and the officers using pepper spray in order to find ways to further reduce, with a goal toward eliminating on a specific date, the use of pepper spray.

Response f:

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.

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 spay 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.

The Department investigated options to provide the Mandt System training remotely but determined that it would not support an effective implementation. The Department remains committed to fully implementing the Mandt System in Fiscal Year 2021-22.

Recommendation g:

Establish a TRU unit at Urban Camp.

Probation established a TRU Unit ("Trauma Response Unit") at Kearny Mesa several years ago, and pledged to expand this successful program to all its locations. In 2016, the TRU Unit received a Challenge Award from the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), which honors innovative practices in California counties. However, Probation has not expanded this program and appears to have discontinued the program in favor of generalized trauma training of staff. While generalized trauma training for staff is no doubt helpful, the Commission recommends that Probation continue and expand this successful program and create a true therapeutic environment for the youth.

Response g:

As the Commission noted, due to the success of the Trauma Responsive Unit (TRU), the Probation Department expanded the training and approach of the TRU unit to all staff. The overall goal of this is to replicate the therapeutic environment in all units. This approach is an improvement in that it will impact more youth, and it is also a more viable option as it is no longer feasible to operate a separate unit with our reduced population numbers. The new Youth Transition Campus will help the Department achieve this goal with smaller living units, trauma-informed design, and normative features to support healthy youth development. Further, new housing units at the YTC will include mental health clinicians in each unit.

Recommendation h:

Ensure and document staff training in PREA ("Prison Rape Elimination Act") and document PREA staffing levels.

The Commission recommends that all staff, including County Office of Education staff, receive documented PREA training. The Commission also recommends that the required PREA staffing levels be documented in the institutions, including in the classroom.

Response h:

The Probation Department agrees and will review the recommendation with our education partner.

Recommendation i:

Ensure that breakaway sheets and/or suicide prevention bedding is provided for all youth. Providing breakaway sheets and/or suicide prevention bedding has been a longstanding recommendation from the Commission for many years. Two suicide attempts occurred at Urban Camp in 2019, one using a sheet and the other a bath towel. For the safety of the youth, we recommend that suicide prevention bedding and towels be provided immediately.

Response i:

The Probation Department has procured 175 Harm Reduction Blankets to date and additional purchases are planned. The department currently provides Harm Reduction blankets to youth who have been identified as at risk for self-harm and anticipates expanding their use as supply increases, with the goal of replacing all bedding.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Juvenile Justice Commission 2020 Facility Inspection Report for Urban Camp.

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
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