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Yolo County's Main Jail Discouraged Inmate Visits, County Grand Jury Reports

Grand Jury recommends reforms to bring policies in line with those of neighboring counties

(Woodland, California) -- Monroe Detention Center visitation policies have been unnecessarily onerous and have discouraged family and friends from seeing inmates, according to a report released today by the Yolo County Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury's investigation, triggered by a citizen complaint, found that Yolo County's main jail required visitors to telephone between midnight on Sunday and 7 a.m. on Monday to schedule a visit with an inmate for the week ahead. Appointments could not be made online.

Following questioning by the Grand Jury, jail staff introduced a new appointment process.

"In addition to bringing indictments in criminal cases, the Yolo County Grand Jury serves as a resource for citizens who have complaints or concerns about how local government operates," said Judy Wohlfrom, foreperson of the 2017-18 Grand Jury. "This report is an example of how the Grand Jury can recommend improvements that can make life better for people in our county."

As part of its investigation, the Grand Jury reviewed posted visitation policies for jails in El Dorado, Napa, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin and Solano counties. The review found that no neighboring detention facility confines appointment scheduling to a single day of the week or to hours when most people are asleep or getting ready for school and work.

In addition, many neighboring detention facilities offered online appointment scheduling and some hosted video visits.

The Yolo County Sheriff's Office, which administers the Woodland jail, states in its own policies that county detention facilities "shall enable and encourage inmates to maintain contact and relationships with family and friends through the visiting process."

Research has shown that when inmates stay connected with their children, spouses and other loved ones, they adjust better to prison life and are significantly less likely to reoffend after their release.

In its report, the Grand Jury made three recommendations:

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- The Yolo County Sheriff should direct the Monroe Detention Center to further encourage jail visits by revising the schedule for making appointments by establishing extended hours that are more convenient and family-friendly.
- The Monroe Detention Center should study the policies of similar county jails and adopt best practices for visitation scheduling.
- The Monroe Detention Center should explore possible funding from Yolo County or other sources to enable implementation of an online scheduling system for making appointments and video visits.

The Grand Jury noted that Monroe officials interviewed during the investigation expressed willingness to test a less restrictive appointment process “as soon as possible.” Monroe officials also indicated that an expected new computer system may allow them to offer online scheduling within two years.

The full report will be posted online on the Grand Jury’s website:

<http://www.yolocounty.org/business/community/grand-jury/yolo-county-grand-jury-reports>

About the Yolo County Grand Jury

The Yolo County Grand Jury is made up of 19 citizens selected by the Yolo County Superior Court. Jurors serve one-year terms that conclude on June 30 each year. In addition to advising the county District Attorney on whether to bring indictments in select criminal cases, the Yolo County Grand Jury also conducts an annual inquiry into the condition and management of public jails and serves as a citizen watchdog over public offices and agencies within the county.

Yolo County residents who are interested in participating on the Grand Jury may learn how to apply at www.yolocounty.org/business/community/grand-jury.

How to file a complaint with the Grand Jury

Residents who have a complaint or concern about a public official or entity can download an application here: <https://yolocountyca.seamlessdocs.com/f/CitizensComplaintForm>. Complaint forms are also available at the county courthouse, county jail facilities and local libraries, or can be requested by calling (530) 406-5088 or writing to the Grand Jury, P.O. Box 2142, Woodland, CA 95776. Completed complaint forms, including any relevant evidence, should be mailed to P.O. Box 2142, Woodland, CA 95776 or emailed to grandjury@sbcglobal.net.