

# 2017-2018 YOLO COUNTY GRAND JURY NEWS RELEASE

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## **Yolo County Grand Jury Highlights Juvenile Hall Deficiencies**

*Recommends Yolo County reevaluate Office of Refugee Resettlement contract*

The Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility last year failed to consistently report potential felonies committed by detainees to the county district attorney's office as required by law, according to findings released today by the Yolo County Grand Jury.

In an investigation triggered by a citizen complaint, the Grand Jury found that Juvenile Hall detainees committed at least 10 assaults on staff and made one escape during 2017. Only one of these potential felonies was reported to the District Attorney.

The Grand Jury concluded that several factors explain why all of the crimes weren't reported, including sloppy policies, inconsistent document flow and inadequate staff training.

"As part of its mandate, the Grand Jury is responsible for visiting and reviewing detention facilities annually within Yolo County," said Judy Wohlfrom, foreperson of the 2016-17 Yolo County Grand Jury. "The finding that felonies committed by detainees at Juvenile Hall were not consistently reported to the District Attorney was part of this work. I want to thank the members of the Grand Jury's Detention and Public Safety Committee for their hard work investigating this issue."

According to testimony from jail staff, youths housed at the facility under a \$2.97 million annual contract with the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement committed most of the assaults on staff. Staff were injured in some of these attacks.

The escape also involved youths from the refugee resettlement program: Two detainees broke free during transport from Federal Court in San Francisco to Juvenile Hall in Woodland and were later captured by Vacaville Police.

The Grand Jury noted speculation by some Juvenile Hall employees that budgetary concerns might play a role in the failure to consistently report potential felonies, since Office of Refugee Resettlement detainees who commit crimes may become wards of the county, shifting financial responsibility for their care from the federal government to the Probation Department.

Yolo County in 2008 entered into an agreement with the Office of Refugee Resettlement to house unaccompanied alien youths between 14 and 18 years old who pose a risk to

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themselves or others or have been charged with a crime. The contract for Feb. 1, 2017, through Jan. 31, 2018, granted Yolo County \$2.97 million to house and provide needed services for up to 24 refugee resettlement youths, with two one-year optional extensions. That contract was extended for this year.

Yolo County Juvenile Hall is one of only two secure juvenile detention facilities in the country that house youth through the Office of Refugee Resettlement program.

The Grand Jury noted that the American Civil Liberties Union and ACLU of Northern California recently filed a lawsuit accusing the federal government of using unsubstantiated claims of gang affiliation to illegally detain refugee resettlement youth. However, the Grand Jury's investigation did not encompass this concern.

The Grand Jury investigation yielded these additional findings:

- A personal relationship between a Probation Department senior leader and a direct report in the same department violated policy and caused frustration and perceptions of favoritism among staff.
- Cash and property of Juvenile Hall detainees were not cared for properly, due to lack of controls, policies and procedures, or failure to adhere to them.

To address the problems, the Grand Jury made seven recommendations, including these:

- Juvenile Detention Facility staff should report all potential felonies committed by juvenile detainees to the Yolo County District Attorney as required by California law and Probation Department policies and procedures.
- The Probation Department should update and complete its policies and procedure manual pertaining to the Juvenile Detention Facility, with provisions to ensure that ongoing updates take place.
- A strict and formal training curriculum for Juvenile Detention personnel should be put in place, together with proper recordkeeping and review,
- The Yolo County Department of Financial Services should audit, at least annually, procedures related to the control of assets, including money and other property of detainees.
- The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should review the Office of Refugee Resettlement agreement, weighing the benefits and risks, and consider whether to continue the program in Yolo County.

## **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

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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](http://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](mailto:grandjury@sbcglobal.net).