

Inmate Visitation Policy at the Yolo County Monroe Detention Center

SUMMARY

The 2017-2018 Yolo County Grand Jury received a complaint alleging that the process for scheduling visits with inmates at the Yolo County Monroe Detention Center, the county's main jail, is unduly restrictive and inconvenient. An investigation by the Grand Jury confirmed that in order to schedule a visit for the week ahead, visitors are required to place a telephone call between midnight Sunday and 7 a.m. Monday, hours when most people are presumably asleep.

After surveying practices at other detention facilities in the region and reviewing the relevant research literature, the Grand Jury recommended that the Monroe Detention Center adjust the hours during which appointments can be made. The Center administration agreed to test new hours as soon as possible in order to better fulfill its stated mandate to enable and encourage inmates to maintain relationships with family and friends through regular visits. Such visits can reduce recidivism, promote adjustment to prison life, and contribute to a successful re-entry to society after release.

The Grand Jury further recommends that the Monroe Detention Center make it possible for visitors to schedule appointments online, and that the facility invest in videoconferencing technology that makes remote visits possible.

BACKGROUND

According to the Yolo County Sheriff's Office Policy on Inmate Visiting (see bibliography): "The Detention Division shall enable and encourage inmates to maintain contact and relationships with family and friends through the visiting process. Visits are scheduled on a regular basis, limited only by the physical and personnel constraints on the facilities."

However, rather than enabling and encouraging visits, current practice discourages them. The procedure for making appointments places unnecessary burdens on persons wishing to visit their relatives or friends in the Monroe Detention Center by requiring them to call on Mondays between 12:01 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. to schedule appointments for visits during that week.

APPROACH

- During this investigation, the Grand Jury conducted interviews with the administration of the Monroe Detention Center to discuss the rationale for its visitation policy and schedules.
- The Grand Jury reviewed the Yolo County Sheriff's Office Detention Division Policy Manual relating to policies regarding inmate visiting.

- The Yolo County Sheriff's office provided schedules and rules for inmate visiting, and the Grand Jury reviewed them. This information is also available in the lobby of the Monroe Detention Center and online (see APPENDIX).
- The Grand Jury obtained online information concerning the visitation policies and schedules of several adjacent and nearby counties (see APPENDIX).

DISCUSSION

The main area of concern identified by the Grand Jury is the restrictive and burdensome schedule that visitors are required to follow to make appointments to visit incarcerated relatives and friends. The Monroe Detention Center Inmate Visitation schedule includes the following information and rules:

1. The purpose of family visiting is to allow children, younger siblings, and grandchildren under the age of 18 to visit with their parent/guardian or grandparent.
2. Visits are for 30 minutes.
3. All family visits ... will be scheduled by appointment only. An approved visitor will call the Monroe Detention Center at (530) 668-5245 and select options 1, 1, 5 to schedule an appointment.
4. Appointments can be made for the current week only between the hours of 12:01 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. on Monday morning.
5. Family visits count toward the visitation limit of up to two half-hour visits per week. No more than two children may visit at a time. One adult must accompany them. If [the] inmate has more than two children, and the inmate has visiting time available, an additional appointment must be scheduled.

The Grand Jury investigation focused on the third and fourth rules above requiring appointments and restricting the time during which appointments can be made.

The 312-bed Monroe Detention Center is classified as a medium/maximum security facility. It is the main jail for Yolo County. The Sheriff's Office also operates the 142-bed Leinberger Detention Center, which primarily houses inmates who work at various city, county, and state agencies to reduce their jail time. The Leinberger Center also maintains fixed visiting hours and requires visitors to place telephone calls to schedule appointments, but it does not restrict the hours during which visitors must call. Monroe and Leinberger are the only jails operated by Yolo County.

The Grand Jury conducted an online search to determine the visitation policies and schedules at county jails in El Dorado, Napa, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano,

and Sutter counties (see APPENDIX). This survey showed that some facilities allow online scheduling and drop-in visits. Some have video-visit capabilities. None required visitors to make appointments by calling in the middle of the night on a single day of the week. Only the Yolo County Monroe Detention Center requires visitors to make appointments during hours when most people are sleeping.

During the Grand Jury's interview with Monroe administrators to explore visitation policies and practices, facility representatives cited a number of factors as rationale for the current appointment scheduling process. These included computer challenges, visiting room and facilities limitations, security concerns, the time required for vetting visitors, and personnel constraints.

The Grand Jury suggested that adjusting the start and/or end time for making appointments might be possible without increasing demands on personnel. Increasing the number of hours during which calls are accepted would also help to enable and encourage visits. During the Grand Jury interview, the administration agreed to test new schedules as soon as possible. In addition, administrators said a new computer system that will allow more efficient scheduling of appointments, possibly including online scheduling, may be possible within the next two years.

The Grand Jury also proposed that Monroe institute a video-visiting system. Video visits can be made remotely, such as from home, avoiding the need for visitors to physically travel to the jail. But such systems require visitors to have access to computers or other devices such as tablets, and detention facilities to invest in appropriate equipment. The investment by Monroe might be offset by savings in personnel time required for security during visits, and would allow more visits to more inmates in any given time period. Mann (see bibliography) provides a brief explanation of video visiting, including some pros and cons of the technology.

Jail visitation may have benefits to society. A paper published by Duwe and Clark (see bibliography) examined the effects of prison visitation on recidivism. The researchers found that visitation significantly decreased the risk of recidivism. They also concluded that visitor-friendly prison visitation policies could yield public safety benefits by helping offenders "establish a continuum of social support from prison to the community." A paper by Bales and Mears (see bibliography) also concluded that visitation reduces and delays recidivism.

A third research team, Casey-Acevedo and Bakken (see bibliography), pointed to the potential value of video visits. They found that the major impediment to visitation was the distance that visitors, especially children, had to travel to reach the prison. They

concluded that visitation could promote adjustment to prison life and foster better societal adjustment afterward. “If there is to be prison visitation, as is the trend throughout the nation, then prisons and states will have to expend resources to facilitate it,” these authors concluded.

FINDINGS

- F1. The Monroe Detention Center permits visits with inmates by family members and friends, but its scheduling procedure is unduly inconvenient and discourages rather than encourages such visits.
- F2. The Monroe Detention Center would benefit from an online system that would allow visitors to make appointments more conveniently.
- F3. The Monroe Detention Center would further enable and encourage visits by investing in video-visiting technology that allows remote visits with inmates by family members and friends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Yolo County Sheriff should direct the Monroe Detention Center to implement a revised, more convenient and more family-friendly schedule for making visiting appointments (to be implemented by Oct. 31, 2018).
- R2. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should allocate funding for implementation of an online system for making visiting appointments (to be implemented by Dec. 31, 2020 with evidence of planning by Oct. 31, 2018).
- R3. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should allocate funding for implementation of a video visiting system (to be implemented by Dec. 31, 2020, with evidence of planning by Oct. 31, 2018).

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows.

From the following governing body:

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors - F1, F2, F3, R1, R2, and R3

From the following elected official:

- Yolo County Sheriff - F1, F2, F3, R1, R2, and R3

INVITED RESPONSES

From the following individual:

- Jail Commander of Yolo County Monroe Detention Center - F1, F2, F3, R1, R2, and R3

The governing body indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Yolo County Detention Division Sheriff Office Policy Manual, Title: Inmate Visiting Policy T-300, Effective Date: October 1, 1999, Revision Date: May 31, 2002
- Understanding the pros and cons of video visitation systems in corrections. <https://www.correctionsone.com/products/facility-products/inmate-visitation/articles/283087187-Understanding-the-pros-and-cons-of-video-visitation-systems-in-corrections/> Melissa Mann. CorrectionsOne Special Report.
- Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism. Grant Duwe and Valerie Clark. First Published Dec. 6, 2011. Criminal Justice Policy Review. Research Article.
- Inmate Social Ties and the Transition to Society. Does Visitation Reduce Recidivism? William D. Bales and Daniel P. Mears. First Published June 4, 2008. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency. Research Article.
- Visiting Women in Prison: Who Visits and Who Cares? Karen Casey-Acevedo and Tim Bakken. Published online Oct. 12, 2008. Journal of Offender Rehabilitation. Research Article.

Note: Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

APPENDIX

Links to the visitation policies and schedules of the Yolo County Monroe Detention Center and several county jails in adjacent and nearby California counties:

Yolo County Monroe Detention Center:

<http://www.yolocountysheriff.com/services/jail/visiting-hours/>

El Dorado County:

https://www.edcgov.us/Government/sheriff/Jail/Pages/jail_visiting_information.aspx

Napa County:

<http://www.countyofnapa.org/Pages/DepartmentContent.aspx?id=4294981524>

Placer County:

<https://www.placer.ca.gov/departments/sheriff/corrections/jailvisitation>

Sacramento County Main Jail:

https://www.sacsheriff.com/Pages/Organization/Main_Jail/InmateVisitation.aspx

San Joaquin County:

https://www.sjgov.org/sheriff/custody_visitinfo.html

Solano County:

https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/custody_division/jail_visiting_information/justice_center_detention_facility.asp

Sutter County:

https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/custody_division/jail_visiting_information/default.asp