

2024-2025 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



JAMES G. BOWLES JUVENILE HALL

Trying to Make a Dollar Out of Fifteen Cents

Release Date

March 10, 2025

JAMES G. BOWLES JUVENILE HALL

Still ...

“Trying to Make a Dollar Out of Fifteen Cents”

Tupac Shakur



Mural of Tupac Shakur
Photo courtesy of JGBJH staff

SUMMARY:

The 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) issued this Continuity Report as a follow up to the 2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury report titled *Kern County Probation Department Youth Services Bureau*. The 2023-2024 Grand Jury investigated the three detention facilities the Probation Department Youth Services Bureau (PYSB) manages.

Since June 30, 2023, PYSB has been responsible for housing and treatment of the most serious and violent juvenile offenders until they reach the age of 25. The PYSB is a branch of the Kern County Probation Division. It consists of three in-custody facilities: James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall (JGBJH), Camp Erwin Owen, and Crossroads.

The Grand Jury reviewed the 2023-2024 Grand Jury’s recommendations and Kern County Board of Supervisors (KCBOS) responses to determine which ones had been addressed, funded, and/or implemented. This report addresses recommendations and responses for specific improvements to the James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall.

The Grand Jury toured JGBJH on September 24, 2024, as part of a detailed investigation of the facility. This included interviews with key staff members and a site visit to each detention facility. The Grand Jury inquired into the facility's operations and conditions of confinement. The staff reported that JGBJH has the same recruitment and retention issues as the other juvenile facilities, resulting in mandatory overtime that affects the delivery of essential services to the juvenile offender population. The staff is motivated, dedicated, and shares a keen interest in preparing juveniles for further court processes and the transition back into their communities to become law abiding citizens.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to California Penal Code §919(b), the Grand Jury “shall inquire into the conditions of confinement and management of the public correctional institutions within the county.” This also includes facilities housing juvenile offenders. This report addresses specific recommendations and responses from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury carefully reviewed the report of the JGBJH from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury to evaluate their findings and recommendations. That report covered the conditions of the three probation detention facilities of Kern County after the Division of Juvenile Justice completed realigning the juvenile offender population, with the closure of its statewide facilities, and the dissolution of the California Department of the Youth Authority.

In addition to the site visits of the three juvenile probation detention facilities, the Grand Jury reviewed multiple resources including the internet, Board of State and Community Corrections reports, Kern County Probation Department Annual Reports for the last four years and earlier Grand Jury reports. Interviews were conducted with members of staff at all three detention facilities and key members of the administrative management team.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

- A. James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall¹ opened in 1952. It was originally established as the only short-term detention facility for youth offenders pending juvenile court processing and adjudication in Kern County. JGBJH currently operates the following units which provide medical, mental healthcare, rehabilitative treatment, and family services:
- PYSB's higher security 108-bed maximum in-custody facility for at-risk female and male offenders between the ages of 14-18.

¹ Juvenile Hall (JH) – a county facility designed for the reception and temporary care of youth detained in accordance with the provisions of Title 15 Minimum Standards for Juvenile Facilities and the juvenile court law.

- The Pathways Academy is a 23-bed unit for female offenders.
 - The Furlough Treatment Program (FTP) with 30 beds for short term male probation violators.
 - Central School, located at JGBJH, provides education to Pathways Academy, FTP, and youth pending the court process. Vocational classes are not available at Central School, however high school and college classes are available.
 - A new multipurpose building was considered by the Board of Supervisors in Fiscal Year 2023-2024 to provide a venue for organized physical fitness activities for the juveniles detained at JGBJH.
 - JGBJH is the only facility that houses temporary detainees who are waiting for court appearances or custody assignments (family reunification or foster care) in Kern County.
- B. The 2023-2024 Grand Jury report stated the following common to the three facilities:
- The PYSB is experiencing chronic understaffing, low entry-level wages, job burnout from mandatory overtime and the inability to attract applicants with the required educational background.
 - The Probation Department recommended wage increases based on the higher requirements for staff and staff shortages. The recommendation failed to meet the Measure K Committee's threshold for funding.
 - PYSB has a [staff] vacancy rate of nearly 20% (72 staff [vacancies] for 389 positions). Youth Services Officers (YSO) work mandatory overtime which negatively impacts job performance due to fatigue and burnout.
 - The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommended that the Board of Supervisors create a higher entry-level salary for newly hired YSOs, because current wages are too low to be competitive and hinder retention of staff.
- C. The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommended that funding be provided for JGBJH to repaint the dormitory rooms that showed peeling paint by September 1, 2024 (See Appendix A).
- D. The General Services Department was allotted \$5,745,802 in the 2024-2025 budget for construction of the multi-purpose building at JGBJH².
- E. PYSB has \$394,192 funding committed to replace roofing at JGBJH.

² County of Kern Fiscal Year 2024-25 Recommended Budget



Left is the old door, and right is the new door with a broader view of the cell.

Photos courtesy of the JGBJH staff

- F. PYSB has \$1,778,741 funding committed to replace cell doors at JGBJH.
- G. Expenditures for supplies and services for JGBJH is \$756,425 a year. The facility is over 80 years old and showing signs of advanced aging due to deferred maintenance.
- H. PYSB has consolidated the YSO classification from two positions to one.
- I. The Kern County Board of Supervisors (KCBOS) provided a draft response to the facts and recommendations proposed by the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report. KCBOS partially agreed with Finding #1 and Finding #2 recommendations proposed for addressing employee retention and addressing staff shortages (See Appendix B).

FINDINGS OF THE 2024-2025 GRAND JURY:

- F1. PYSB has been unable to recruit or retain sufficient staffing levels because of its inability to offer competitive compensation. The recent change in the YSO classification may improve the recruitment and retention process but it is too soon to see results. Recommendation R1 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.
- F2. PYSB is in the process of negotiating with the union restructuring the hiring process to offer higher entry level pay, mandatory overtime should be greatly diminished. Recommendation R1 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.
- F3. The Probation Department currently conducts exit interviews when employees depart. Exit interviews provide needed documentation to support changes in recruitment and employment hiring practices. Recommendation R3 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.
- F4. Residual money from the approved budget allowed a security fence upgrade for JGBJH. The fence security upgrades are nearing completion. The new sally port and fenced area by the Re-entry, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entrance and the Re-programming trailer is awaiting final walkthrough. The fenced area by the Youth Development Center library is also complete and awaiting a final walkthrough. These improvements will prevent detainees from entering restricted areas.



Fence Security Upgrades
Photo courtesy of JGBJH staff

- F5. JGBJH has no onsite electrical generator putting the facility at risk during power outages. This could lead to a lack of potable water and emergency water for fire protection. Kern County BOS approved the generator project. It is awaiting General Services - Construction Services direction. JGBJH has been in contact with Construction Services and has been told there will be a project meeting early 2025. Recommendation R5 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.
- F6. JGBJH has addressed the peeling paint and broken door windows. The first phase of the project was completed in the Pathways Academy and the 200A units. JGBJH also replaced the doors in the safety rooms and the holding rooms. The second phase is anticipated to begin in 2025. The doors are being built and once those are completed, JGBJH will schedule installation of the doors in the remainder of the units. These improvements will increase the safety and security of these facilities. Recommendation R7 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.
- F7. The 2024-2025 Grand Jury investigation discovered a communication problem existed between Probation Department and General Services on maintenance requests, project proposals, soft cost estimates, and timely follow up for proposed requests. The miscommunication issues have been resolved. PYSB is holding quarterly meetings and has appointed a liaison from Administration to represent General Services with Special Projects. Recommendation R8 from the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report has been met.

COMMENTS:

JGBJH has made considerable progress toward satisfying the recommendations of the 2023-2024 Grand Jury's report. The Grand Jury interviewed staff members of PYSB who expressed genuine interest in redirecting young people from destructive behaviors, encouraging positive change, and preparing them to reunite with their families. PYSB was given the role of being 100% responsible for detained juveniles in the facility. The closing of Youth Authority facilities, the aging of detention facilities, and the inability to recruit and retain employees has placed a large financial burden on their budget. The reduction of county general funding coupled with California's 2024-2025 \$58 billion budget deficit (Legislative Analyst Office, January 15, 2024), creates the potential to have state funding reduced, and has the potential to greatly impact PYSB. PYSB needed to trim its budget with limited resources while still "Trying to Make a Dollar Out of Fifteen Cents."

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2024-2025 GRAND JURY:

R1. KCBOS should expedite approval to create a higher entry salary for newly hired YSO's by June 1, 2025 (Finding #1)

R2. PYSB should reduce mandatory overtime by July 1, 2025. (Finding #2)

NOTES:

- The Kern County Probation Department should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website <https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**

Kern County Board of Supervisors

Findings #1, #2 and #7

Recommendations #1 and #2

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 60 DAYS FROM:**

Kern County Probation Department

Findings #1, #2 and #7

Recommendations #1 and #2

**RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO CAL. PENAL CODE
§§ 933(c) AND 933.05**

- **PRESIDING JUDGE
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF KERN
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**
- **FOREPERSON
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code § 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 Grand Jury.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A

2023-2024 Grand Jury Recommendations: (That pertain to James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall)

R1. Expedite approval to end YSO promotional series and create a higher entry salary for newly hired YSOs by October 1, 2024, resulting in reduction in mandatory overtime. (Finding 1)

R3. Using the Probation's Human Resources Department to create and implement a system by June 1, 2024, for conducting exit interviews when an employee departs the organization. Senior Probation Department staff should review exit interviews quarterly and submit an annual report to the Kern County Human Resources Department. (Finding 2)

R5. Purchase a standby electrical generator for JGBJH to operate the potable water system. This work should be completed by November 1, 2024. (Finding 4)

R7. Repaint the dormitory rooms at JGBJH that have peeling paint by September 1, 2024. (Finding 6)

R8. Establish quarterly communication meetings between General Services and the Probation Department starting June 1, 2024, to ensure that both departments are working cohesively on all projects and maintenance requests. (Finding 7)

APPENDIX B

Kern County Board of Supervisors Response to the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Final Report

titled: *Kern County Probation Department Youth Services Bureau*

Response to Findings F1-F7:

Kern County agrees with the Grand Jury's findings F2, F4, F5, and F7. Kern County partially disagrees with findings F1, F3, and F6. For Finding F1, employee wages are often a central issue in recruitment and retention; however, more information is needed as far as competitiveness with similar positions and possible impacts. Wages are subject to legal requirements for meet and confer with employee representatives and will need to be reviewed in a larger context, including internal and external comparability, compaction issues, available funding, and many other factors. As to Finding 3, while the County agrees the current trailers housing the mental health team at Camp Erwin Owen are aging and in need of replacement, the trailers provide an area for group treatment sessions and individual sessions, as well as office space for mental health staff. The Probation Department has also made temporary alternative spaces available to conduct group and individual sessions with youth to ensure confidentiality pursuant to HIPAA laws. On Finding 6, while the County agrees some rooms are in need of repainting, we do not agree this constitutes a violation of Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Standards. BSCC conducted inspections of all facilities in June of 2023. In BSCC's comprehensive inspection report dated January 24, 2024, no areas of noncompliance were noted.

Response to Recommendation:

R1: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department expedite approval to end the Youth Services Officer (YSO) Promotional Series and create a higher salary for newly hired YSOs by October 1, 2024, resulting in a reduction in mandatory overtime.

The recommendation will require further analysis. Terms and conditions of employment are subject to negotiation with designated employee representatives. As the designated negotiators for Kern County, the County Administrative Office and Human Resources Division will examine proposals and make recommendations based on a number of critical factors. The County Administrative Office, Human Resources Division, and the Probation Department will continue conversations to determine the most effective strategies for recruitment and retention of YSOs.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department seek re-consideration for funding approval from Measure "K" Oversight Committee by January 15, 2025.

The recommendation requires further analysis. Measure "K" is a limited revenue source and approval for funding is dependent on availability. Measure "K" funding was approved for high priority projects and needs. All new Measure "K" funding proposals will be evaluated

on the priorities on which the public adopted the sales tax measure, strategic planning to enhance the quality of life for residents and improve operations, and strategic deployment to meet demand of services both short- and long-term. The Probation Department has submitted proposals for Measure "K" funding, which will be considered with other proposals for available funds. Additionally, other funding sources may be available to address needs at the Probation Department, which are assessed through the regular budget process.

R3: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department use its Human Resources Department to create and implement a system by July 1, 2024, for conducting exit interviews when an employee departs the organization. Senior Probation Department staff should review exit interviews quarterly and submit an annual report to the Kern County Human Resources Department.

This recommendation will be implemented, but later than July 1, 2024, due to required analysis. The Probation Department agrees exit interviews would benefit both employees and the department by providing a better understanding of potential barriers to recruitment and retention. The Probation Department is committed to researching meaningful ways to conduct the interviews and submit reports to Kern County Human Resources. Internal protocols will need to be established by the Probation Department. At this point, it is unknown what additional technology and other resources are needed to create effective processes; as such, the anticipated implementation date is January 1, 2025.

R5: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department purchase a standby electrical generator for James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall (JGBJH) to operate the potable water system. This work should be completed by November 1, 2024.

The recommendation will be implemented. This project is in the early stages of implementation and is anticipated to be completed in fiscal year 2024-2025. The Board of Supervisors has allocated \$725,000 for this generator project. The project has been established with the General Services Division and work is anticipated to begin in late spring of 2024. During the implementation period, if short term power outages arise, the Probation Department will continue to rent portable generators to power the water pump house. Youth will be provided with bottled water, as has been done in the past.

R7: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department repaint the dormitory rooms at JGBJH that have peeling paint by September 1, 2024.

This recommendation will be implemented. Repainting rooms is an ongoing process and is typically handled internally by the Probation Department. As staffing allows, the Probation Department plans to paint the rooms during the installation of new security doors, which began in April 2024.

R8: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Probation Department establish quarterly communication meetings between General Services and the Probation Department starting June 1, 2024, to ensure that both departments are working cohesively on all projects and maintenance requests.

The recommendation will be implemented. The Probation and General Services departments are both committed to establishing scheduled quarterly meetings to discuss maintenance requests, project proposals and updates, cost estimates, and other subjects to complete projects timely and effectively.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF KERN

TRACKING PAGE

APRIL 29, 2025

TUESDAY - 2:00 P.M.

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COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

CA-43) Proposed response to Grand Jury report titled James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall
(Fiscal Impact: None) - APPROVED; AUTHORIZED CHAIRMAN TO SIGN
CORRESPONDENCE
Couch-Flores: All Ayes

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

SUPERVISORS

Phillip Peters..... District 1
Chris Parlier..... District 2
Jeff Flores..... District 3
David R. Couch..... District 4
Leticia Perez District 5



KATHLEEN KRAUSE
CLERK OF BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, California 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay 800-735-2929

April 29, 2025

The Honorable John W. Lua, Presiding Judge
Kern County Superior Court
1415 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Dear Judge Lua:

Transmitted herewith is the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2024-2025 Grand Jury's Final Report titled James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall, follow up to the 2023-24 Grand Jury report titled Kern County Probation Department Youth Services Bureau.

The Board of Supervisors appreciates the Grand Jury's review and input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Leticia Perez", written over a horizontal line.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

NA/SH/COMPL_GJ Probation-JGBJH A

Attachment

cc: Grand Jury

Kern County Board of Supervisors
Response to Grand Jury Final Report
Kern County Probation Department – James G. Bowles Juvenile Hall

Response to Findings F1-F7:

Kern County agrees with the Grand Jury's Findings F2-F7. For Finding F1, employee wages are often a central issue in recruitment and retention; however, wages are subject to legal requirements for meet and confer with employee representatives and will need to be reviewed in a larger context, including internal and external comparability, compaction issues, available funding, and many other factors.

Response to Recommendation:

R1: The Grand Jury recommends that The Kern County Board of Supervisors expedite approval to create a higher entry salary for newly hired Youth Services Officers by June 1, 2025.

This recommendation will not be implemented. Finding F1 in the 2024-2025 Grand Jury report acknowledges that the 2023-2024 Grand Jury's Recommendation # 1, to change the Youth Services Officer series and increase the entry salary, had been met and that "it is too soon to see results" of the changes made. On January 13, 2025, the Civil Service Commission approved the proposed collapse of the Youth Services Officer I/II flex classification with the pay scale set at the previous Youth Service Officer II salary range, which increases the entry level pay offered to new Youth Service Officer employees. The Board of Supervisors gave final approval for this classification change at the Board of Supervisors' meeting held on January 14, 2025.

Since the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report, the Board of Supervisors has also approved pay increases for this classification, some of which have not yet gone into effect. On July 16, 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Kern County Probation Officers' Association, which represents the Youth Services Officers classification. The MOU included salary increases of 5% beginning July 13, 2024 and 4% beginning July 12, 2025, for the Youth Services Officer classification.

The current MOU already includes approved pay increases for this classification and it would be premature to approve a higher entry salary before the previously approved increases have gone into effect. Salaries will be evaluated in the regular negotiations process. The County Administrative Office, Human Resources Division, and the Probation Department will continue conversations to determine the most effective strategies for recruitment and retention for these positions.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends that Probation Youth Services Bureau (PYSB) should reduce mandatory overtime by July 1, 2025.

The recommendation will be implemented but also requires further analysis and explanation. Based on recent changes to the entry-level pay and ongoing recruitment efforts by the Probation Department for the Youth Services Officer classification, it is anticipated that vacancy rates will be reduced. However, while that is the primary factor in the need for mandatory overtime, there are other factors related to ongoing leaves of absence and modified duty by existing permanent staff which will continue to impact mandatory staffing levels required by the State for youth facilities. When existing staff are on any type of leave of absence or modified duty, their position cannot be backfilled through hiring of additional permanent staff beyond the number of positions allocated to the Probation Department and the required staffing levels must continue to be adhered to. To help further mitigate this impact on use of mandatory overtime, the Probation Department is attempting to increase the number of Extra-Help Youth Services Officers employed. These temporary employees can be used as needed to cover shifts in each of the Probation Department's youth facilities, which will reduce the need for mandated overtime for permanent Youth Services Officers.