

# **2024-2025 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY**



## **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PROPERTY ROOM Overdue for an Upgrade**

**Release Date  
May 8, 2025**

# **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PROPERTY ROOM**

## **Overdue for an Upgrade**

### **SUMMARY:**

On December 17, 2024, the 2024-2025 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inspected the existing Kern County Sheriff's Property and Evidence Facility (Property Room) located at 1501 L Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301. The Grand Jury identified concerns that include unsanitary conditions such as poor ventilation and evidence of pests in the narcotics storage areas. The Grand Jury also noted inadequate stand-by power, insufficient air conditioning and an outdated freight elevator that can be considered useless. The Property room is congested and can no longer receive larger items without expanding its space. Kern County allocated more than \$7 million to construct a new property room that is set to be located at 34970 McMurtrey Avenue, Bakersfield, CA 93308.

### **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

The Grand Jury is charged to address conditions affecting the health and welfare of staff working in law enforcement storage facilities. This report addresses the working conditions and space used for the collection and maintenance of seized property in Kern County related to crimes and found items, such as firearms, that need to be protected.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

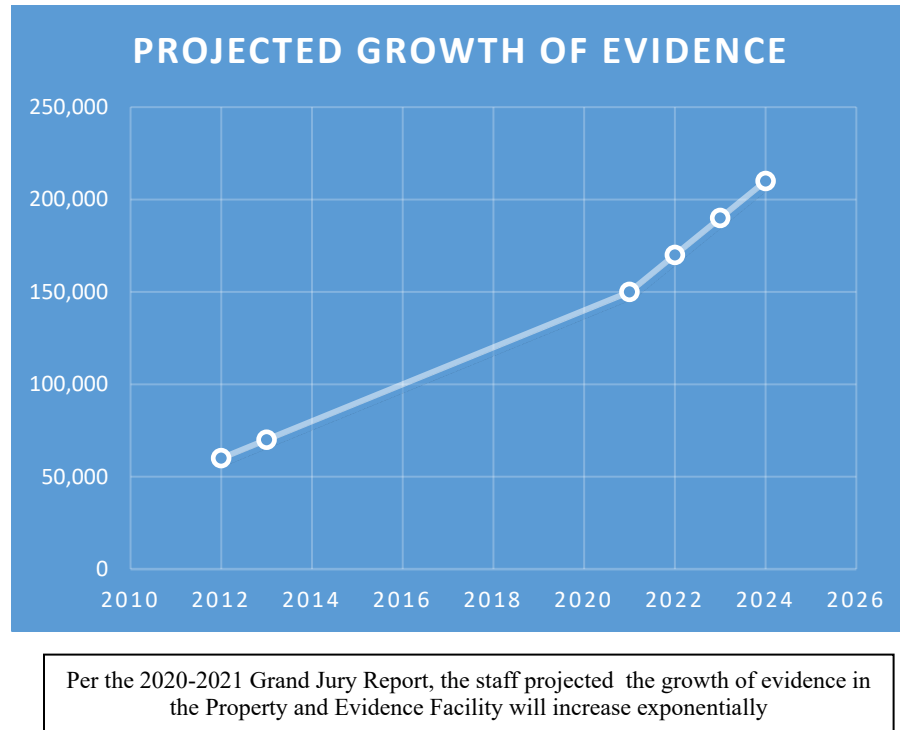
The Grand Jury toured the site of the new Property Room located at 34970 McMurtrey Avenue on August 20, 2024. The Grand Jury interviewed personnel and toured the existing Property Room on December 17, 2024, located at 1501 L Street. The following is an analysis of the need for the move and what this results in once the move is completed. The Grand Jury also reviewed prior Grand Jury reports regarding the current property room from 2012-2013 and 2020-2021.

### **DISCUSSION OF FACTS:**

When the Property Room moved into the L Street location in 1957, only 200 items were moved. The Kern County Sheriff's Office estimates the present move will involve nearly 200,000 items. The Grand Jury spoke to the officers in charge of the property room at 1501 L Street. The Grand Jury's inquiry concerned the date for the future move to the new facility. After a briefing of the need and expediency of the move, the staff gave a tour of the new facility and updated the Grand Jury on the revised move date. Property Room personnel are accountable for security and evidence retrieval ensuring proper chain-of-custody for

potential court proceedings. Additionally, they are responsible for returning lost-and-found property surrendered to law enforcement agencies to the rightful owner:

- A. All evidence is bar coded upon arrival and audited annually. Property Room Sheriff's Aides conduct frequent audits on weapons, cash, and narcotics. There are approximately 195,000 pieces of evidence in the facility; the oldest dates to the 1930s.
- B. The Property Room is responsible for receiving, securing, releasing, and storing a variety of evidence and property. In addition, safeguarding law enforcement evidence for the Kern County Sheriff's Office (KCSO), District Attorney's Office, County Probation Department, Kern High School District Police Department, Bear Valley Police Department (for destruction of firearms only) and the Kern County Parks and Recreation Department related to various crimes. Many pieces of evidence are preserved and protected indefinitely in compliance with statutory mandates.
- C. Many storage areas of the existing facility require security cards for access; however, access to firearms, narcotics, and money require the presence of two authorized personnel. The sergeant assigned to the facility audits the access records on a regular basis.
- D. The first and second floors of the existing facility are covered by a new fire suppression system:
  - In the event of a fire in the current Property Room a sergeant, lieutenant or commander of the Property Room would have to access the facility before the fire department could enter and possibly damage the facility
    - It takes 15 minutes or more for an officer to arrive during off duty hours
    - No emergency key system is currently available if a fire broke out during off duty hours
- E. The evidence freezer contains biological evidence, e.g., swabs, blood, and saliva samples:
  - Refrigerated evidence may be damaged or destroyed in the event of a significant power loss
  - Most of this evidence relates to old cases from homicides, deaths, and sexual assaults
  - The loss of evidence can influence the outcome(s) of affected cases
- F. Evidence is rarely lost or misplaced, however:
  - The Grand Jury learned of only one incident of evidence mishandling
  - A pest infestation in the basement compromised marijuana evidence



- G. Staff adds approximately 30,000 pieces of new evidence to the Property Room annually. KCSO expects rapid growth of evidence collection in the future:
- The rack system is in the basement due to its weight. The support columns in the existing basement enhances the building structure. The basement rack system for homicide evidence has no remaining storage space
  - The sexual assault storage area is nearing capacity and is not adequately air conditioned:
    - Sexual assault evidence degrades over time
    - Sexual assault evidence must be stored more than 20 years; the staff in the property room have never purged any of this evidence from storage
  - The staff regularly destroys, returns or discards evidence, as allowed by statute. This frees up storage space, but not enough to alleviate the overcrowding of the existing facility
- H. Sheriff's office has a written plan to ensure there is strict enforcement of the proper chain of custody for all items being moved to the McMurtrey Property Room.



Basement rack system for homicide evidence at the L Street Property Facility  
Photo by the Grand Jury



Miscellaneous boxes stored at the L Street Property Facility  
Photo by the Grand Jury





Sexual assault storage area at the L Street Property Facility  
Photo by the Grand Jury



The McMurtrey Avenue Property Facility  
Photo provided by the Kern County Sheriff's Office



The McMurtrey Avenue Property Facility  
Photo provided by the Kern County Sheriff's Office

## FINDINGS:

- F1. The McMurtrey Avenue property room will be an invaluable asset to Kern County Law Enforcement and solves the problems inherent with the L Street facility. This state-of-the-art structure has been designed and constructed to meet Kern County's property and evidence storage needs for now and the foreseeable future.
- F2. The L Street facility is unsanitary, and there is evidence of a pest infestation. This could compromise the evidence especially in the area where marijuana is stored.
- F3. The L Street facility storage room is overloaded with property to the point where it is a fire hazard. In the event of a fire in the Property Room, a sergeant, lieutenant or commander would have to access the facility prior to the Bakersfield Fire Department (BFD) entering. Forced entry into the building would likely cause destruction of evidence, potentially jeopardizing the delicate chain of custody.
- F4. The L Street facility has no emergency generator, and in the event of a power outage, evidence stored in refrigerated units could be compromised or destroyed.
- F5. The L Street facility has limited space to continue to manage the property and evidence. The current collection and storage rate is unsustainable.
- F6. The L Street facility freight elevator is expensive to maintain and fails to provide a reliable lift transportation for staff and the movement of evidence and property between floors.

## **COMMENTS:**

The Grand Jury determined through interviews, review of relevant documents and onsite tours that the KCSO Property and Evidence Facility remains essential to the Kern County justice system. The L Street facility can no longer serve its purpose because it has outgrown the design and storage capacity for the efficient management of critical evidence.

The Grand Jury determined during interviews with KCSO and General Services staff that delays opening the McMurtrey Avenue facility were the result of changes in the original ownership, construction supply chain shortages, and a change order regarding the installation of a passenger elevator.

The KCSO was allocated \$7 million in general funding for the McMurtrey Avenue Evidence and Property Facility as well as a lease-to-own agreement for the future purchase of this multiuse building.

The KCSO command staff stated evidence and property stored in this area is connected to active or appellant cases and cannot be disposed of without a court order. Staff stated efforts are continuing to be made to cull evidence and property consistent with automated notification processes. KCSO staff stated that all efforts are being made to expedite the relocation to the McMurtrey site and KCSO will be prepared to initiate the transfer as soon as the facility is inspected and cleared for occupancy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R1. The KCSO develop an interim afterhours fire response policy for the L Street Evidence and Property Facility. This should be completed by June 30, 2025, effective through the move to the McMurtrey Avenue location. (Findings #3 and #4)
- R2. The KCSO's Evidence and Property management should expedite the relocation of its operations to the McMurtrey Avenue Facility, resolving its evidence storage limitations, electricity generator, elevator, and HVAC needs. This relocation should be initiated by June 30, 2025, and completed no later than December 30, 2025. (Findings #1 through #7)



## NOTES:

- The Kern County Sheriff's Office 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 through #6  
Recommendations #1 and #2

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 60 DAYS FROM:**

Kern County Sheriff's Office  
Findings #1 through #6  
Recommendations #1 and #2

- **RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO CAL. PENAL CODE §933:**

- **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.
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