

Improper delays alleged

Sat 3-17-12
LA Times

[Sheriff, from AA1] sequences of funding cuts, often including a detailed accounting of calls for service that the Aero Bureau had to miss.

In his lawsuit, Cook quotes a 2010 email from an Aero Bureau sergeant: "If we go short and calls are missed we need to record the missed calls and provide our executives with the proper records so they can fight the fight."

Sheriff's spokesman Steve Whitmore said the allegations of misconduct are being thoroughly investigated.

He also said the department has completed a separate internal criminal investigation into allegations that Aero Bureau officials had improper relationships with contractors. Whitmore said that probe found no wrongdoing, though the results won't be presented to prosecutors until next week.

"When all is said and done," he said, "we are confident that the department will be cleared."

Elizabeth M. Kessel, an attorney representing the county in the lawsuit, described Cook in a statement as "a disgruntled former employee. This litigation will show that his allegations are meritless, based on gossip and innuendo."

Cook said he began noticing problems soon after he was transferred from his post as a unit commander on Catalina Island to the Aero Bureau in 2009.

His lawsuit alleges that in May 2010 he learned that some deputies and sergeants were getting more overtime than others.

Cook, now retired, also alleges that division supervisors were making use of the department's air fleet when commercial flights would have been significantly cheaper. One county aircraft, he said, "was used as the personal aircraft" by some officials when attending out-of-state meetings.

In his lawsuit, he claims he took his concerns about the wasteful spending to his chief, telling him "the department will have problems if the Los Angeles Times found out."

Cook also alleged that the Board of Supervisors was misled into believing that a project to outfit helicopters would cost \$12 million more than needed. He said sheriff's officials also made a contract so narrow in scope that only one avionics company could compete.

Whitmore confirmed that department investigators are probing allegations that Aero Bureau officials improperly used aircraft.

The accusation of irregularities in business with contractors was referred to the county auditor, who he said found no impropriety, Whitmore added.

Sheriff's air unit bosses accused of deliberate delays

Sat 3-17-12 LA Times

A former staffer's lawsuit says responses to calls were slowed to deter budget cuts.

ROBERT FATURECHI

Los Angeles County sheriff's investigators are probing allegations that supervisors from the department's Aero division purposely delayed responding to calls for emergency air support.

At least one former Aero Bureau supervisor has publicly made accusations of impropriety. In a lawsuit filed against the county, Lt. Edison Cook said deputies were instructed by their supervisors to "slow down on service

calls in order to miss calls for service." One sheriff's supervisor, Cook said, instructed other supervisors to complete their quota of required special shifts during the day, not the night, when most calls for service go out.

On one occasion, the three-decade veteran said, he drew criticism from his captain when, during one shift, he assigned an aircraft to a deputy without one: "We don't want to field too many ships because then it would look like we could get along without overtime."

During the period of the alleged manipulation, Sheriff Lee Baca was regularly alerting the Board of Supervisors, which controls his budget, to the negative consequences.

[See Sheriff, AA6]

Coaxing children to talk — about crime

Mon 3-19-12 LA Times

USC professor's work helps authorities navigate young and troubled memories.

LARRY GORDON

The interview begins on a cheerful note. USC law professor Thomas Lyon asks a 4-year-old to tell him about her last birthday. She says she took ice cream, chocolate and cake, "mixed it up and ate it." Then she shared some with her brothers.

Lyon gently turns to the tragic matter at hand. "Tell me why you came to talk to me; tell me what happened," he asks the child, the only eyewitness to a homicide. At first she mumbles "hmm" a

few times and rocks in her chair as Lyon repeats the question. And then she starts talking about seeing her mother stab the child's great-grandmother in their home. "She was killing her by the bike," the girl says. "I see," Lyon continues. "And how did she kill her?" "With a sharp knife," she says.

With that exchange, Lyon, then a consultant for the Los Angeles County district attorney's office, elicited key information the police could not. That videotaped session is often viewed around the country by social workers, lawyers and law enforcement authorities who want to improve how they interview children in custodial, abuse and criminal cases.

Lyon, a Harvard-trained attorney with a doctorate in

[See Professor, A8]

Whom does secrecy serve?

JIM NEWTON

WE'RE IN THE second month of a vitally important experiment at the Los Angeles County Dependency Court, where court officers and others are wrestling with what it means to be watched. So far, so good: The public has gotten a look, not one child has been hurt, and awareness is slowly growing.

Taking advantage of the order by Michael Nash, the presiding judge of Juvenile Court, I made another trip recently to the Monterey Park courthouse where Dependency Court is housed. Just a few months ago that would have been unthinkable, as dependency hearings — where the fates of children in the foster care system are decided — were closed except in unusual circumstances. But Nash concluded that the press has a legitimate interest in the goings on of Dependency Court and that reporters should be presumptively allowed to attend proceedings there — that is, they can be excluded only if lawyers object and can convince a judge that a journalist's presence would create a reasonable likelihood of harm to a child.

The significance of Nash's order hasn't entirely sunk in at the courthouse. When I arrived, I was greeted by a surly bailiff who refused to let me so much as sit in the courtroom, and by a lawyer who represents children in the system and who insisted that the press' right of access does not extend to the "calendar call," when the judge calls up and dispenses with much of the day's caseload. Judge Tim Saito ruled otherwise, though. Lawyers in each case on the calendar objected to my presence, but he overruled them every time. I stayed. The bailiff glowered.

What followed was the litany of heart-breaking business that plows through Dependency Court every day: families pulled asunder by drugs and abuse; agonizing decisions about whether to return children to a home where abuse had occurred or leave them separated from parents or siblings.

One case had to be postponed because the father was in Mexico. In another, Saito returned a child to the mother but directed her to attend drug-counseling and domestic-violence classes. "I always see this as an opportunity for a fresh start," he gently told the young woman.

To know if
the system
protects kids,
the press
needs access.

She nodded, trembling a bit and sniffing nervously.

Even with the veil lifted by Nash's order, secrecy continues to work its mischief in these proceedings. There was, for instance, the complicated case of a man and a woman whose infant daughter was taken from them by the county just days after her birth because the parents had previously been found to have abused their children.

The case has dragged on for years — the little girl is about to turn 2 — and because the whole saga has played out in a closed courtroom, it's hard to know whom to hold responsible for delays that have resulted in the girl's spending her entire infancy in limbo. A family is waiting to adopt her but has been unable to while her biological parents fight to get her back.

This protracted contest continued on the day I was in court, as the father briefly appeared before Saito to demand a new lawyer. "Are you dissatisfied with your counsel?" Saito asked. "I'm dissatisfied with the whole court," he responded.

Secrecy has become routine for Dependency Court, but as this example illustrates, it's often hard to see whose interests that has served. When the case was called last week, the lawyer for the father moved to have me excluded on the vague grounds that it would intrude on her client's privacy. But during a break in the proceedings, the father sought me out and complained that privacy has hidden the misdeeds and indifference of social workers and his own lawyers.

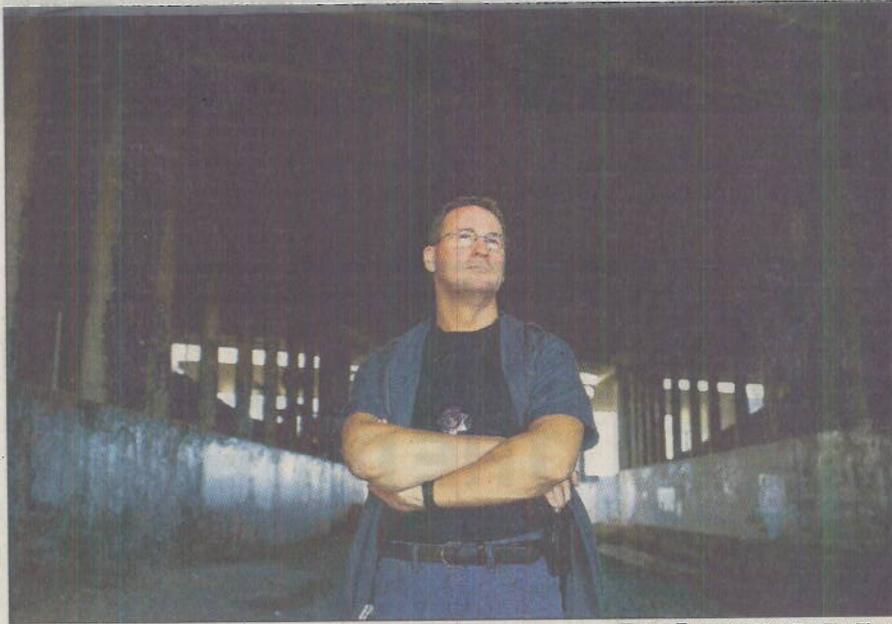
"They're trying to make it seem like we haven't learned anything from our parenting classes or our domestic-violence classes," he said. "We don't have anyone to raise a voice for us." He said he feels victimized, not protected, by privacy, and he urged me to use his name: It's Carlton Vereen.

Conversely, secrecy may have protected this father from scrutiny. It came out in court that he's plowed through lawyers and caused repeated delays without anyone watching. And his actions have postponed resolution of the case — and stability for his daughter — for month after month.

So, if secrecy can be bad for the child and bad for the parents, for whom is it good? Well, it undeniably serves the interests of those whose judgments might be second-guessed. Vereen says his lawyers have done him a disservice, but no one's been there to watch. The judges who have heard the matter over the years have granted delay after delay while the child's life goes by. Perhaps they've been justified, perhaps not. How would we know? They're public officials, but in name only, as they do their work outside the reach of public scrutiny.

Last week, Vereen again fired his lawyer, and Saito again granted a delay, so the little girl's limbo was again extended. The only difference is that this time, a reporter was there to witness it.

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KATIE FALKENBERG For The Times

SAN BERNARDINO POLICE Sgt. Dwight Waldo near a graffitied overpass. After years of chasing taggers, he knows a thousand names from the walls. But he will never say them aloud. "It's what they want: fame and recognition."

COLUMN ONE

Mon 3-19-12 LA Times

Graffiti cop answers scrawl

Officer Dwight Waldo has long drawn a bead on taggers. What some saw as petty vandalism became something more to him.

SAM QUINONES
REPORTING FROM SAN BERNARDINO

The flood channel near Interstate 10 has been scarred by hundreds of graffiti tags and, like a wound that never heals, treated countless times with drab paint. Beneath the layers of beige and gray are jagged markings that dominate San Bernardino Police Sgt. Dwight Waldo's world.

He has tracked them for two decades — chasing taggers through back alleys, recovering hundreds of weapons from their hangouts and memorizing, then forgetting, more than 5,000 tags. What many in law enforcement once viewed as petty vandalism, mostly the work of teens with spray cans, early on became something more to Waldo.

The graffiti on those walls promoted

gangs, fostered serious crime and poisoned residents' sense of well-being.

In his quest for understanding, Waldo — who, friends say, doesn't swear, drink or walk against traffic lights — became a nationally recognized expert on the swaggering urban culture of wall-writing. He wrote the manual, self-publishing "Taggers and the Graffiti Culture," a how-to for law enforcement.

"He's been kind of the godfather of it all," said Sgt. Chris Meadows of the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's anti-graffiti squad.

Now 54, Waldo said he plans to retire this year, although he knows he will never be completely free of his life's work. After years of chasing taggers across San Bernardino, he knows a thousand names from the walls.

But he will never say them aloud.

[See Waldo, A9]

Helping children who can testify

[Professor, from A1] psychology from Stanford, is a leader in the field.

His work has helped show that open-ended, non-judgmental questions can prompt more detailed narratives from children, whether about birthdays or murder. His federally funded research also shows that getting a child to promise to be honest actually makes it more likely that they will tell the truth.

Lyon, who is 50 and the father of two teenagers, said there is no trauma in his past that propels his interest in child abuse. In fact, he said, warm memories of his Nebraska upbringing made him want to work with children during his adult career. After law school, he worked in the Los Angeles County Counsel's children's division and then studied child psychology.

At USC, where he's taught since 1995, he holds a rare dual professorship in law and psychology, combining a passion for justice with a workish pursuit of data.

"Actually I find abuse work often terribly depressing, but what keeps me in it is how great the kids are despite the abuse they suffer. They still tend to be really resilient, really interested in things, really excited about stuff," he said. "And that's inspiring."

His field has generated debate among psychologists and lawyers for decades. The McMartin preschool case in the 1980s — in which children's allegations of sexual abuse and satanic rituals were found to be unreliable — underscored how controversial the topic of children's memory can be. Afterward, much research focused on avoiding coercive questioning and false accusations.

That emphasis was valuable but swung too far



KATIE FALKENBERG For The Times

FROM HIS COLORFUL VAN, USC professor Thomas Lyon experiments with getting kids to speak up — and to tell the truth. His research has been influential in the treatment of children in the justice system.

toward skepticism and ignored larger problems of underreporting and secrecy, said Lyon, who is past president of the American Psychological Assn.'s child maltreatment division.

"Anyone who works with abused kids knows the kids are afraid and threatened and reluctant and ashamed," said Lyon, who has a soft-spoken manner.

Critics say Lyon tends to be too pro-prosecution. Elizabeth Loftus, a UC Irvine law and cognitive science professor who has consulted for the defense in abuse and murder cases, including McMartin, said she thinks Lyon's experiments on children's truth-telling are worthwhile. But she said Lyon "sometimes is so attached to the idea of child abuse, as horrible as it is, that he overlooks other things like civil liberties of accused people."

Lyon said he is not out to convict the innocent but wants the criminal justice system to understand how memories of childhood abuse can last through adulthood.

Lyon is among the experts who have trained sher-

iff's deputies in interviewing methods that they've subsequently used in recent abuse cases in the Los Angeles Unified School District, said L.A. County Sheriff's Department Sgt. Dan Scott. Sheriff's investigators spent months interviewing past students of a former teacher at Miramonte Elementary, who has been charged with 23 counts of lewd conduct.

Mary Murray, a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney, recalled a case involving a 6-year-old boy who was a key witness to the torture and murder of his mother by his father. Lyon obtained detailed videotaped statements from the child about hearing the beating and seeing his mother collapse. He was adopted by his paternal grandfather, and at trial two years later, the boy said he couldn't recall anything; the video was allowed as evidence, and the father was convicted.

"It sounds and looks really easy until you try it yourself and hit a brick wall," Murray said. Lyon "is able to mine a child for whatever information a child has to offer."

An expert on the tagging culture

Lyon is a prolific researcher who receives substantial federal backing. Grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to him and collaborators are expected to total \$3.6 million over a decade by 2015.

Much of Lyon's current federally funded research does not directly involve crime but focuses on what helps children honestly recall events.

Some of the experiments are conducted with abused or neglected children at the dependency court in Monterey Park. Others are done during visits to schools near USC in a special van turned into a playroom with a table, toys and a hidden video recording console. Citing privacy rules, Lyon did not allow a reporter to attend the sessions but made tapes available.

In one set of experiments, an adult warns the children, ages 4 to 9, not to tell anyone that they played with, and sometimes broke, a toy; then another adult tries to elicit the truth.

A fidgety 6-year-old named Terrell is encouraged by one of Lyon's assistants to play with a Lego house but urged to keep mum about it; then another adult coaxes a confession.

"She tell me to trick you," Terrell spills.

Others show what good liars young children can be. Like a loyal mobster facing the FBI, Ashley, 6, sticks to her story. Even though she did play with the forbidden toys and broke one, she in-

sists she didn't. But in what may have been a pang of guilt, she asks, "Are the breakable?"

One of the studies is what Lyon calls "the oath." The interviewer asks children to promise to tell the truth and reassures them that nothing bad will happen if they do. About 40% then provided accurate accounts, double the number of those who were not asked to make the promise.

Other experiments show children are more likely to tell the truth when they are informed that an adult recounted what had happened in the playroom.

Some experts question the relevance to abuse cases, saying children would face much more pressure to stay silent. Lyon concedes that many children did lie and that resistance would be higher in child abuse. Although there is no easy solution, he said, it is important to check which methods make things worse and to later test promising ones in abuse cases.

At USC law school, he is training the next generation of child interviewers. During a recent class, his students showed tapes of their practice interviews about Christmas celebrations, using Lyon's techniques. In one, a 9-year-old says his mother made holiday doughnuts and told him to eat just one. Unprompted, he confesses to snagging a second. "I got a little sneaky," he says, smiling.

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Waldo grew up in the village of Bath, N.Y., about 100 miles southeast of Buffalo.

After a stint in the military that brought him to Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, he joined the Police Department in 1984 and seven years later was attached to its gang unit.

One of his first assignments was to investigate some scrawls that had gone up on walls near a high school. After the arrest of five young suspects was reported in a local newspaper, dozens of people called to thank the police for their work. Not long after that, Waldo said, a 12-year-old boy was killed in his own frontyard by a bullet meant for his brother. Authorities determined that the older youth had been targeted by a gang for dropping out of its tagging crew.

Those incidents crystallized for Waldo the pernicious effects of graffiti on the community.

He threw himself into investigating taggers, spending hours at night poring over photos of their unique signatures. He concluded that graffiti fell into five distinct categories, reflecting a desire to communicate beliefs, express hatred, mark territory, seek personal fame or display artistic talent.

He cataloged hundreds of names and monikers in a bulging three-ring binder. That got unwieldy, so in 1992 he bought a computer and entered all the information on a spreadsheet.

He devised a way to help decipher the more mystifying tags: One officer would attempt to "read" the graffiti out loud as another, listening with eyes shut, would verbalize whatever came to mind.

"When the mind is not engaged in observing letters and is only hearing ... sounds, it becomes clear what the actual name is," Waldo explained.

He is intense by nature: When he decided to take up music a few years ago, he learned how to play the violin, piano, pedal-steel guitar, mandolin, dulcimer, acoustic guitar and bagpipes. Similarly, chasing taggers became an obsession.

The more he learned, he said, the more he seemed to be fighting a losing battle.

When Waldo became a cop, Southern California police departments were

awash in gang crime and homicides and paid little attention to tagging. San Bernardino, the sergeant said, formed and dissolved its anti-tagging unit more than once.

Over the years, Waldo watched as taggers moved from using simple spray cans to fire extinguishers filled with paint. Once-ragged crews began using rock-climbing gear to scale old warehouses and learning to spray-paint while hanging upside down to tag freeway overpasses.

Then, in 2007, Waldo got a call from Jackie Lacey, chief deputy prosecutor in the Los Angeles

County district attorney's office. Tagging-related crimes — burglaries, shootings and homicides — were on the rise, and Lacey wanted to increase graffiti prosecutions. But the office knew little about graffiti culture.

Waldo showed up with armloads of material he'd compiled.

With Lacey's help, he put together "Taggers and the Graffiti Culture," a manual that looks as underground as the world it describes: a sheaf of 110 printed pages bound in black tape.

To guard its secrets, Waldo ripped the back pages out before showing the manual to a reporter. The part he was willing to share outlined how to write search warrants for taggers' houses and listed telltale graffiti tools: shoe-polish bottles, acid (for etching in glass) and notebooks in which each tagger practices his moniker.

His pamphlet "set a standardized foundation" for tagging investigations, Meadows said.

One lesson in the manual — that taggers crave attention from their own — proved valuable last

AN Expert ON the tagging culture

cont.
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year when Waldo and his team set out to find whoever was marking up the flood channel near the I-10 in south San Bernardino. The tagger, they realized, was numbering each piece of graffiti. He included names and small arrows. "At one point he had over 50 [tags] up in this area," Waldo said.

It turned out the arrows pointed toward the neighborhood where the 18-year-old and his crew lived. Asking questions, the investigators found the tagger's home. He pleaded guilty to graffiti vandalism and was sentenced to probation.

Waldo is unromantic about the taggers' art and advises law en-

forcement officers to keep it simple. "The difference between art and vandalism," he says in the manual, "is permission."

Although the public and some in law enforcement associate taggers with gangs, Waldo said, that's an oversimplification.

"Graffiti is all about going to an unusual location and putting up your artwork," Waldo said while strolling through his own neighborhood, violin and bow in hand. "I do kind of the same thing.... I like the surprise of people finding something that they're not planning to encounter."

(His neighbors, he said, have gotten used to hearing "Brown-

Waldo figures that in the five years since his manual has been available to law enforcement, he's trained more than 1,000 officers at seminars and helped form about 200 anti-graffiti programs around the country.

In Southern California, many cities and counties have boosted budgets for removing graffiti and prosecuting taggers. The Orange County Sheriff's Department, for example, created a database to map taggers regionally, allowing cases to be pursued across counties.

San Bernardino has made inroads against graffiti since 2009, the year Waldo's unit was reconstituted and a 24/7 cleanup crew was formed. According to the public works department, the number of square feet covered with scrawls dropped from 4 million to 2 million last year. Now, most tags stay up for only a matter of hours before they're removed.

In another sign of how things have changed, Waldo said, he was cleaning some tags off a fence a few months ago when two young, heavily tattooed men whom he didn't recognize approached.

The possibility that they were gang members intent on keeping their graffiti intact led the sergeant, who was dressed in street clothes, to reach for his gun.

When the pair saw that he was removing the graffiti, they reached out to shake his hand.

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Part of troubled lockup could be shuttered

[Jail, from A1] sheriff's task force reforming the jails, said Baca has ordered his staff to examine the logistics of clearing out Men's Central's "old side" but has not yet committed to any specific plan.

Baca's spokesman, Steve Whitmore, said the sheriff intends to discuss the plan with members of the county Board of Supervisors before unveiling it publicly, perhaps in several weeks. Whitmore said sheriff's officials hope any proposal they adopt will not result in more early releases.

With about 4,500 inmates, Men's Central is touted by the Sheriff's Department as the largest single jail facility in the world.

"Nightmarish to manage" is how the Board of Supervisors' special counsel on law enforcement issues, Merrick Bobb, described the jail several years ago in a confidential report after a series of inmate-on-inmate killings in 2003 and 2004. He warned of the possibility of an inmate takeover that "would be nearly impossible to quell without the spilling of so much blood as to be morally, pragmatically, and politically indefensible."

The plan that sheriff's officials are now considering involves closing the jail's older wing, which was built in 1963. The area has been the scene of some of the most frequent clashes between deputies and inmates.

The facility's third floor — called the 3000 floor — houses some of the county's most dangerous inmates, including killers and notorious gang leaders. Many face the possibility of a lifetime in prison and are known to fashion makeshift knives from toothbrushes and sharp spears from ripped magazines to attack fellow inmates or guards.

THE THIRD FLOOR of 1

The Times reported last year that sheriff's managers assigned some of their least experienced deputies to the third floor. While deputies at Men's Central had 31 months of experience on average, those assigned to 3000 had only 20 months, according to 2009 sheriff's memos. Some deputies were assigned to 3000 as rookies, one report said.

The 3000 floor saw more force incidents — 437 — than any other in Men's Central from 2006 through 2010, department records show. The third floor drew public scrutiny in 2010 when The Times reported that a fight broke out at a department Christmas party between a group of deputies assigned to 3000 and other jailers. After the brawl, sheriff's officials said deputies on the third floor had formed an aggressive clique whose members

'It doesn't sound like a bad idea, but the big question is how much bed space are you going to lose?'

ROBERT OLMSTED,
retired sheriff's commander,
on the sheriff's proposal

flashed gang-like three-finger hand signs.

Robert Olmsted, a retired sheriff's commander who warned about deputy cliques and inmate abuse before he left the department in 2010, said the Lynwood jail's design would make it easier for deputies to keep a close watch on high-

security inmates. The jail's cells were built around a security booth, giving deputies inside a good view of each cell. By contrast, deputies assigned to Men's Central have to walk long rows to see what inmates are doing in their cells.

"It doesn't sound like a bad idea, but the big question is how much bed space are you going to lose?" Olmsted said.

Whitmore said that if clearing out the old side of Men's Central turns out to be unfeasible, one possibility would be moving the lower-security female inmates currently in Lynwood to the downtown jail.

Hellmold said Baca signaled his openness to moving inmates out of parts of Men's Central in a meeting this week with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. The or-

ganization has argued that the county incarcerates too many people and that some could await trial on home detention or serve their sentences outside jail.

The county has struggled for years to carry out other plans to improve jail operations, and it remains unclear whether Baca's new concept will fare any better.

In 2006, the Board of Supervisors approved a \$258-million proposal to reopen the Sybil Brand Institute for Women in Monterey Park and build new barracks for female inmates at the Pitchess Detention Center in Castaic. The plan called for moving high-security male inmates to the Lynwood jail.

But the construction was never begun. The county is now considering whether to spend \$1.4 billion on a state-of-the-art facility to replace Men's Central. County su-

and notorious gang leaders. Supervisors have so far balked at the price tag.

In 2007, Baca championed a change in state law to allow him to put more offenders on home detention, reducing the number of serious criminals being released early. But once the law was changed, the plan stalled when jail managers discovered that the vast majority of inmates had serious or violent criminal histories that made them unsuitable for home release.

One factor that is different this time is that the jails are the subject of an FBI investigation into multiple allegations of brutality and other misconduct by sheriff's deputies. The probe has already resulted in the bribery conviction of one deputy.

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Baca could shut part of jail

Plan would shift inmates to a newer facility but reduce capacity

JACK LEONARD
AND ROBERT FATURECHI

Facing a federal investigation into allegations of brutality in his jails, Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca is considering a bold proposal to shutter a portion of the department's most troubled lockup that has been plagued by inmate killings, excessive force by guards and poor supervision.

The plan would shift about 1,800 inmates, including many of the county's most violent criminals, from the old section of Men's Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles, a sheriff's jail commander said. The inmates would probably be moved to a newer facility in Lynwood that currently houses women.

If adopted, the plan would bring significant changes to the way the nation's largest jail system is

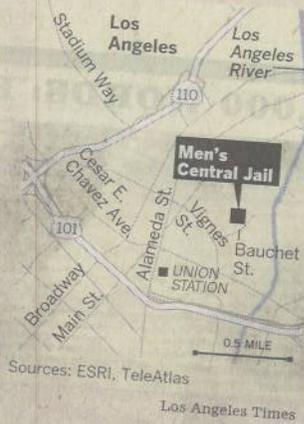
Troubled lockup

History: Men's Central Jail was built in 1963 for \$16.3 million.

Original capacity: 3,323 inmates

Expansion: Capacity increased in 1976 to 5,276 inmates at a cost of \$35 million.

Current capacity: 4,600. There are 4,451 inmates in the jail at this time.



Sources: ESRI, TeleAtlas
Los Angeles Times

Graphics reporting by Scott J. Wilson, Los Angeles Times

run. It would solve what has long been a major problem for the department: having the most violent inmates housed in an antiquated facility. Men's Central is designed with long rows of

cramped cells, rather than the more modern circular configuration that makes controlling inmates, supervising jailers and protecting employees significantly easier.

But closing the section of

Men's Central could have a significant side effect: reducing the number of total inmates the system can handle.

The Sheriff's Department already releases some inmates early because of a lack of funding and is expected to receive thousands of new inmates under a plan that is sending offenders who previously landed in state prison to county jails. Cmdr. Jim Hellmold said it's possible that the reduced capacity that could come with closing much of Men's Central would require more low-risk inmates to be released on electronic monitoring.

The plan would also mark a shift in thinking by Baca, who has up to now talked about closing Men's Central if the county gives him the money to build a new jail.

Hellmold, who is part of a

[See Jail, A13]